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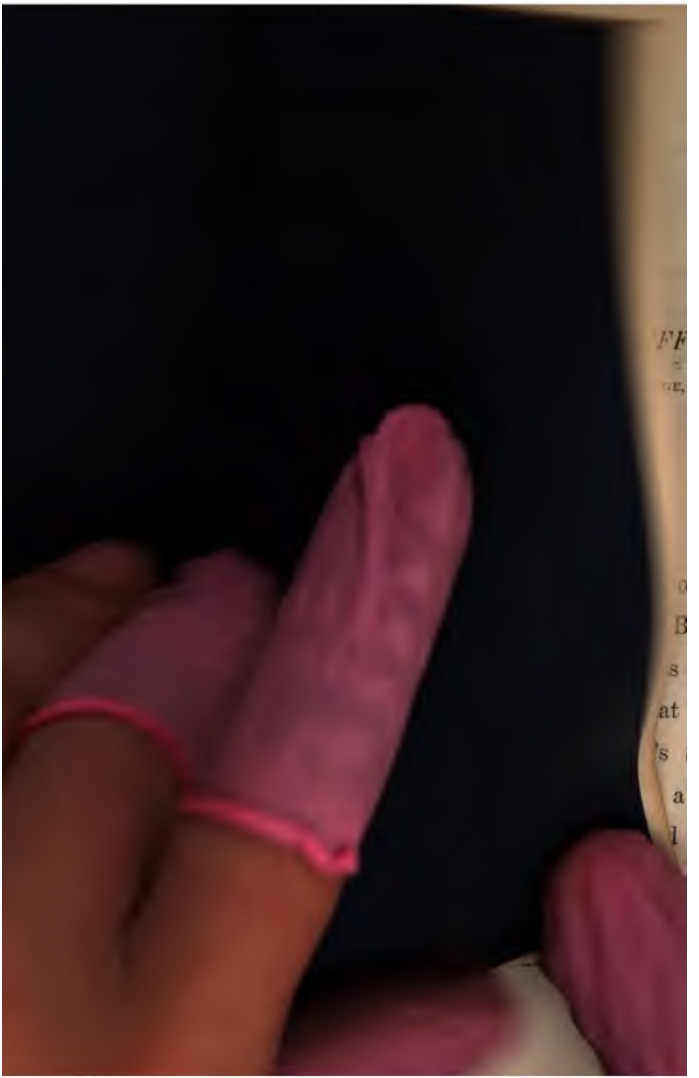

CHRISTIAN BAPTISM EXPLAINED.

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CHRISTIAN BAPTISM EXPLAINED.

BY

REV. WILLIAM GRANT.

"Unto what then were ye Baptised?"

GLASGOW:
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CHRISTIAN BAPTISM EXPLAINED.

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INTRODUCTION.

THERE are two ordinances which Christ has appointed for permanent use in His Church, which are distinguished from all the rest by this marked and striking outward peculiarity; *viz.*, that they are symbolical or emblematical, *i.e.*, they speak to us by visible signs. These are Baptism, with its symbol of Water, and The Lord's Supper with its symbols of Bread and Wine. *

* From an early period in the history of the Church, these two ordinances have been called "THE SACRAMENTS." The original meaning of that title cannot now be accurately ascertained. Some have objected to its continued use in Protestant churches, (1) because it is not found in the Scriptures, and (2) because it has lŏng been associated with the unscriptural and superstitious ideas which the Romish Church attaches to these ordinances. But when we use it merely to describe *those symbolical ordinances whose signs are of divine appointment*, it is a convenient and

We are, therefore, naturally and necessarily led to enquire, what uses this striking outward peculiarity was intended, and is fitted, to serve? In other ordinances, as in the Scriptures and in Prayer, *words* are the medium of communication between God and men. In the Sacraments *signs* are employed. What purpose was intended to be served by this marked and obvious peculiarity?

Reader! thou hast a distinct and well-defined idea of the use of *words* in Scripture and in Prayer. They are an intelligible medium of communication between God and men. But, hast thou as clear an idea of the use of *signs* in the Sacraments? Thou mayest have some idea of the use of the signs of the Lord's Supper. But is it not a strange and unnatural thing if thou art, and art content to remain, in doubt or darkness in regard to

compendious way of expressing a complex thought. This title is not found in the Scriptures, but the idea is. In the Christian Church there are two, and only two symbolical ordinances whose signs have been appointed by God. These, and these alone, are Sacraments.

the use of the signs of Baptism; which, as the initial ordinance of the New Testament, may well be supposed to be the simplest and most elementary of all.

Yet it is to be feared that there are few subjects in regard to which more ignorance or error prevails, or from which, because of supposed difficulties, more turn away in despair. We do not refer to difficulties in regard to the proper subjects of Baptism—who should be baptised. Nor in regard to the proper manner of its administration—by dipping, pouring, or sprinkling, but only in regard to the spiritual uses it was intended to serve.

Baptism has been appointed by Christ for the spiritual benefit of His Church. Error or ignorance in regard to its intended uses must be prejudicial to the interests of individuals, may be fatal in the teaching of churches. It is of the highest importance clearly to understand what its real and intended uses are.

What, then, are thy difficulties in regard to the right uses of Baptism? Dost thou recoil, on the one hand, from the Romish or Ritualistic idea, that some mysterious, magical, or mechani-

cal virtue attends the mere outward dispensation of Baptism; and, on the other hand, from the Rationalistic idea, that Baptism is merely an outward, formal symbol of admission into the visible Church, an external badge of Ecclesiastical privilege, without any promise of inward grace following? Dost thou reject the latter idea as erroneous in the way of *defect*, inasmuch as Scripture teaches that Baptism is a means of grace? and the former as erroneous in the way of *excess*, inasmuch as Scripture nowhere ascribes a mysterious, magical, or mechanical power to any outward ordinance, apart from the exercise of an inward and intelligent faith in Christ?

And dost thou now desire clearly to see, and firmly to grasp some idea which, on the one hand, shall not ignore those solemn and thrilling emotions which Scripture warrants, and which we often feel when we participate in the dispensation of Baptism; and yet which, on the other hand, shall explain these emotions, not in a vague and shadowy way which we can neither analyse nor explain, but in such an intelligent and intelligible way that reason can

understand them, Scripture approve of them, and experience confirm them?

We believe that such an explanation of Baptism is greatly needed at the present time, and is eagerly desired by many. It is the object of the present treatise to supply that want—not in the way of a controversial argument, but in the form of a plain and practical statement of the doctrinal and devotional uses of Baptism.

The idea of Baptism which pervades and characterizes this treatise is—(1.) That in the divinely-appointed symbols of Baptism, we have a short, simple, and authoritative summary of the substance of God's message to man, and of what man's prayer to God should be. In this respect it corresponds, on the one hand, with the Word of God, and on the other hand with the prayers of men; and differs from them in this, that it employs visible signs instead of, or in addition to, audible words.

(2.) That in whatever sense, or in whatever way, the Holy Spirit of God employs the words of Scripture and of prayer as outward means for conveying inward grace to the souls of men, in the same sense, and in the same way, and no

otherwise, He employs the signs of Baptism. There is nothing more nor less efficacious or mysterious in the use of significant signs, than in the use of intelligible words. Both are natural and familiar means for enlightening the minds, and influencing the hearts of men. And both are, and can be, effectual for any saving change, only by the inward working of the Holy Spirit of God.

This is the spiritual or Scriptural idea of Baptism, as distinguished from the Ritualistic and Rationalistic. It teaches that the Holy Spirit of God employs the outward ritual of Baptism, in a rational way, for imparting inward grace to the souls of men.

Such, briefly, is the idea of Baptism (equally applicable to the Lord's Supper) which pervades and characterises this treatise, and in accordance with which we desire to explain its doctrinal and devotional uses.

The uses of Baptism may be considered from two distinct points of view—Personal, or Ecclesiastical. Personal, as teaching us in what relation the baptised stand, or may stand, towards God. Ecclesiastical, as teaching us

in what relation the baptised stand to the visible Church. The latter of these is quite secondary and subordinate to the former. Yet, as subsidiary and eminently helpful to the teaching of the former, it is of great importance. It is, however, in the former point of view that the fundamental and real uses of Baptism are seen. To it, then, we shall first and especially direct attention. And as many difficulties are involved in the question—how any outward ordinance can be made a means of conveying inward grace to the souls of infants?—we shall in the first instance avoid this difficulty by considering in Part I. the uses of Baptism in the case of Adults. We shall then proceed in Part II. to show that the same general principles of explanation are equally applicable in the case of Infants. And finally, in Part III. we shall consider the Ecclesiastical uses of Baptism as seen in the mutual relation that is constituted between the Visible Church and the Baptised.

PART I.

THE USES OF BAPTISM IN THE CASE OF ADULTS.

CHAP. 1.—*First Use of Baptism—an ordinance of Signs which represent the Way of Life.*

BAPTISM is an ordinance of Signs which represent, in a short and simple form, what the substance of God's message to us is, and what the substance of our prayer to God should be. Or, in other words, in Baptism, by a few simple signs, God tells us what we are by nature, what we may be by grace, and invites us to avail ourselves of His offered salvation. By the signs of Baptism God delivers His message to us, and invites us, by these signs, to make our prayer to Him.

This is the first, the rudimentary, idea of Baptism forced on our attention by its

peculiarity as an ordinance of Signs. It is an obvious and simple idea.

In the ordinary business of life, men communicate their thoughts or desires to each other by words and by signs. The medium of their communication may be different. But, whether it be by words or by signs, their design is the same, *viz.*, to inform the understanding, to impress the mind, and thus to influence the conduct of those they address. In cases of great importance, or of urgent need, it is customary to combine these two modes of communication, by adding significant signs to explain, or enforce our words. Thus the impassioned orator makes his meaning more plain and impressive by suiting his actions to his words. The general points to the foe as he gives the order to "charge." The Red Indian buries the hatchet as a sign of the words of peace which his mouth has spoken. And as we call a friend to approach, we also beckon with the hand. Words are a tardier and less impressive means of communication than signs. Signs, like the electric flash of the telegraph, are swifter and more startling

in their brevity than the lengthened words of a letter. But they often need the fuller explanation of a written communication.

Again, it is usual to illustrate the lengthened narrative of a book, by introducing maps, or diagrams, or pictorial scenes. By reason of the natural feebleness or ambiguity of words, and by reason of the ignorance or prejudices of the reader, the author's meaning may be liable to misconstruction. But the map, the diagram, the pictorial scene—in other words, the painted signs, direct attention to the prominent thought, determine its true meaning, explain it, and make it more impressive. Such is the primary, rudimental, or natural design of signs, as employed by men. There is nothing more mysterious in the use of signs, than in the use of words. They are both intelligent and intelligible means of communicating our thoughts to one another. There may be differences in the degree of information they communicate, or of the impressiveness with which they do so,—words may be more fully instructive, signs more deeply impressive; but the mode or manner of operation in both

is the same; *viz.*, by informing the understanding, they impress the mind and influence the conduct of those to whom they are addressed.

Such, then, being the natural and universal use of signs among men, we can well believe that, when God would communicate His will to men, He would employ those means of communication which are natural to men, and adapted to the faculties with which He has endowed us. We may well believe, that as He has availed Himself of the ordinary language of *intelligible words*, so also He has made use of the universal language of *significant signs*. So it was from the beginning, when the forbidden tree was the sign of obedience; the bow in the cloud, the sign of the promise that the earth would no more be destroyed by a flood: "circumcision a sign" of the covenant to Abraham; and the temple, with its priests, and altars, and lambs of sacrifice, types or signs of the promised Saviour. And so it is in New Testament times. God speaks to us not only in the words of Scripture, but also by the significant signs of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. By a few vivid signs He desires to direct our attention to

the most prominent lessons of His Word, to explain their real meaning, to proclaim their paramount importance, and to make them more impressive. The signs of Baptism, appointed by Himself, proclaim the message of God to us in a short and simple form. They may need the words of Scripture fully to explain their meaning; but their very brevity and simplicity are, in an important point of view, their highest recommendation.

> "Picture and parable,
> All truth and love divine,
> In one bright point made visible;
> Hence on the heart they shine."

In the significant signs of Baptism we see the message of God at a glance. Other and farther purposes these signs may be intended to serve. But in *the first place,* and as the root of all the rest, they were intended *to communicate to us a knowledge of the way of salvation, that we might more clearly know what it is.*

But Baptism is also an ordinance of signs, by the reception of which God invites us to make our prayer to Him. Usually we make our

prayer by words; in Baptism we are invited to do so by signs.

As *instituted* by God, the signs of Baptism, like the words of Scripture, proclaim God's message to us. But, as *received* by us, the signs of Baptism become our response to the Message of God. In receiving the message of God delivered to us in the signs of Baptism, we turn these signs and that message into our prayer to God, asking that it may be done unto us according to that message. It has well been said that

> "Prayer is the Breath of God in man,
> Returning whence it came."

When in our prayers we breathe the very mind and spirit of God, we may be confident of an answer in peace. "This is our confidence, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us." When, therefore, at any time we discern the will of God as proclaimed in the words of Scripture, we love to take these very words, and to return them to God as the expression of our prayers. And in proportion as we catch the spirit of these words, in proportion as the breath of God's will is the

breath of our desires, we are emboldened to expect an answer. Just so with Baptism. When in its vivid signs we discern the will of God, and catch the spirit that breathes in them, we are invited, and in the reception of Baptism we profess, to take the very signs that proclaim God's will, and to use them as signs that express our hearts' desire and prayer.

Thus, while by *its institution* Baptism proclaims God's message to us, by *our reception* of it we express our prayer to God. On the part of God Baptism proclaims the way of life, saying by its signs :—

"There is a fountain filled with blood,
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains."

And by the reception of Baptism we reply, saying :—

"Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

Reader! hast thou thus used thy Baptism? Hast thou understood and believed the message which God has delivered to thee in the signs of Baptism? And hast thou turned it into thy prayer to God? If not, the signs of Baptism

have been as valueless to thee as the words of Scripture or of Prayer would be, if thou didst not understand their meaning. Signs are as valueless as words unless they are understood and believed.

Such, then, being the primary and natural use of significant signs, it is needful, before proceeding to consider their further uses, carefully to enquire what are the divinely appointed signs of Baptism, and what is their meaning.

CHAP. 2.—*The Signs of Baptism enumerated and explained.*

SINCE the signs of Baptism are significant, since they proclaim God's message to us, and should express our prayer to God, it is of the utmost importance that we should accurately determine what the outward ceremonial of Baptism is as appointed by Christ. To alter the appointed signs by which God's message is proclaimed to us, either by adding to or taking from them, would be to corrupt or pervert God's message; and would be as injurious as to alter the inspired words of Scripture. The woe de-

nounced against those who wilfully corrupt the Word of God (Rev. xxii. 18, 19) may, in like manner, and for the same reason, be applied to those who wilfully alter the significant signs of Baptism, or of the Lord's Supper.

What, then, are the divinely appointed signs of Baptism? Whatever we see with our eyes in the appointed ceremonial, is a significant sign, and has a meaning. In the ceremonial of Baptism, as described in Scripture, there are two things which are visible:—the element of water, and the action of applying water to the body of the recipient.

These are the significant signs of Baptism whose meaning we have to ascertain. To aid and guide us in ascertaining their true and intended meaning, these signs are accompanied by certain explanatory words: "In (or into) the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."

The ceremonial of Baptism is thus exhausted by these three things:—

I. The element of water.

II. The action of applying water to the body of the recipient.

III. The explanatory words which are employed in doing so.

Proceeding now to interpret the meaning of the Signs, we begin—

I. *With the Explanatory Words:* "IN (OR INTO) THE NAME OF THE FATHER, OF THE SON, AND OF THE HOLY GHOST."

These words, like the inscription attached to a pictorial illustration, tell us of whom, and of what Baptism speaks, proclaiming at once its authority and its subject.

1. The first thing in these words that demands our attention is the peculiar form of expression so often used in regard to Baptism,—baptising "in (or into) the name," &c.

If we accept the translation of the English Bible as the true rendering—"*in* the Name, &c.," then the idea expressed plainly is that Baptism was appointed, and is dispensed "in the Name,"—*i.e.*, by the authority, of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. It was not instituted, nor should be dispensed, by the will or wisdom of the office-bearers, or members of the Church, but only by the authority of God and according to His direc-

tions. It may not be given to any without His sanction. It may not be denied to any for whom it was designed by Him. He openeth and no man may shut the door of admission to Baptism. He also shutteth, and no man may open. Baptism has no authority, and its signs no real meaning, unless it is dispensed "in the Name," *i.e.*, by the authority of God.

But if, as we rather believe, the proper translation is "*into* the Name, &c.," the former meaning is not lost, but another meaning is emphatically added to it. As Baptism is the initial Sacrament of the Gospel, the ordinance by which we are formally admitted into the fellowship of the visible Church, even so it represents the way and means by which fallen men can alone be admitted "*into*" fellowship with God. It *is not the way or the means* by which we are admitted into the fellowship of God. No! it is only an outward sign which represents to the bodily eye the inward and spiritual means by which this may, and alone can, be effected. It is only a sign, or shadow of the good things of which it speaks. But, it is a true and vivid shadow of them.

Apart from both of these words, whether we say "in" or "into," these two ideas are implied in Baptism. But this peculiar expression, so constantly applied to Baptism, very emphatically draws our attention to them.

Realising, then, this twofold lesson, that Baptism was appointed and is dispensed by the authority of God, and that it represents the way and means by which we may be admitted into the fellowship of God, we come to consider what its words say of The God into whose fellowship it calls us.

2. Its words proclaim the Unity of God, and yet the Trinity of Persons in the Godhead.

"Baptised in (or into) *The Name*," not, The Names; but, "The Name." "Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God is one Lord," "His glory will He not give to another." Thus the Unity of the Godhead is proclaimed, but not less distinctly, The Trinity of Persons in that one Godhead. For it is said, "*The Name of The Father, of The Son, and of The Holy Ghost.*" Three Persons, but one Name. The same in Nature as in Name—the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

This doctrine of the Trinity, perhaps the deepest and most mysterious of all the doctrines of the Gospel, as proclaimed in Baptism its initial ordinance, is thus set before us as the foundation doctrine on which all the rest are built—the very A. B. C. of Christianity, apart from which we cannot understand or spell out its remaining lessons. If "the Son" be not the equal of the Father, His atoning death and living intercessions have no power to save. If "the Holy Ghost" be not the equal of the Father and of the Son, His quickening, purifying grace can never meet the manifold and constant wants of universal man. Let us behold, then, and vividly realise that the words of Baptism proclaim that this Triune God is the only living and true God, the God who made us, and from whom we have fallen away by sin,—the God who, in the signs of Baptism, describes the way and means by which He is able and willing to restore us to His fellowship.

3. While the words of Baptism thus proclaim the Trinity of persons in the Godhead, they also proclaim *the union of two natures, Human and Divine, in the one person of Christ.*

For when, in the words of Baptism, our Lord proclaimed His true Divinity, by associating His own name with "the name of the Father and the Holy Ghost," "counting it no robbery to be equal with God," and teaching us to "honour the Son even as we honour the Father"—at the very time when He thus proclaimed His true Divinity He stood before His disciples in human form, the Son of Man. His true humanity was seen by them, and His true Divinity was proclaimed by Him, when He first appointed the explanatory words of Baptism. This also is a doctrine that lies at the very foundation of the Gospel, one of its most initial truths. It proclaims the qualifications of the Lord Jesus Christ to be the Saviour of men; His ability and willingness to accomplish all that the signs of Baptism represent Him as doing. As the Son of man, He died; as the Son of God, there was atoning merit in His death. As born of a woman, He can tenderly sympathise with man; yet, as the Only Begotten of the Father, He is omniscient and omnipotent. He is "a Daysman who can lay his hand upon both, so making peace;" worthy of the confidence of His Father, and

not less worthy of our confidence as His brethren.

4. The explanatory words of Baptism tell us not only of the qualifications of "the Son" to fulfil the work described in the signs of Baptism, but also *that the Father and the Holy Ghost are associated, and co-operate with Him in that work.* One in name and in nature, the three persons of the Godhead are also at one in the work of our salvation. In achieving the work described in the signs of Baptism, they are mutually and equally engaged. "In the name," and by the co-operation "of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," the washing described in Baptism is achieved. Not by any one of them apart from the others, but by their united consent and co-operation. Each person of the Godhead has His own special part or province in this salvation. The Father planned it, the Son provided it, the Holy Ghost applies it. In the plan or purpose of the Father this salvation was like honey in the myriad flowers of the field. As provided by the Son, it was like honey gathered and stored in the comb for the use of man. As applied by

the Holy Ghost it is, like the honey on Jonathan's rod, conveyed to the mouth of men, enlightening their eyes. Thus associated and at one in the work of man's salvation, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are, and must be, one in name and in nature. None but the equal of the Father could have provided the salvation which the wisdom of the Father had planned; and none but the equal of the Father and the Son can apply that salvation with power to the souls of men. It is, indeed, a cheering and most consolitary doctrine that tells us that none of the persons of the Godhead are opposed, nor indifferent, to our salvation, but are all consenting and co-operating; in short, that the way of salvation, described in Baptism, is proclaimed to us "in the name," and admits us "into" the fellowship "of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost;" that "the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Ghost," are freely offered to us in the signs of Baptism.

Such are the lessons suggested by the explanatory words of Baptism. We do not say that we could prove these doctrines from the

words of Baptism alone. But we find them in the Book of whose lessons Baptism is an illustrative picture. It is true, also, that some do not see any of these lessons even suggested by the words of Baptism. But these are the persons who do not see them taught in The Word of God. Those who have learned these doctrines from the Scriptures, cannot fail to find that they are emphatically suggested, and brought to their minds by the words of Baptism.

II. We proceed to consider *the Element of Water.*

In the natural world, water serves many purposes. It is used to wash, or cleanse our bodies from filth or pollution; it is also used to fertilise the soil and to promote the growth of plants, &c., and also as a needful article of food to refresh the thirsty. In the Scriptures, water is frequently figuratively spoken of as an emblem of spiritual blessings in all of these its natural uses. And, perhaps, in Baptism, it may more or less point to all of them. But as, in Baptism, the water is applied to the body of the recipient, we may certainly conclude

that the primary idea intended to be suggested is that of *cleansing, or washing away impurity.*

That this is, indeed, the primary idea implied in the water of Baptism, is still farther apparent from the language of Scripture in such passages as follow.—Acts xxii. 16, "Arise, and be baptised, and *wash* away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord Jesus;" Heb. x. 22, "Having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." "Bodies washed with pure water," is a natural and vivid sign or symbol of "hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." 1. Pet. iii. 21, "Water, the like figure whereunto Baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God);" *i. e.*, "The putting away of the filth of the flesh," is the outward "figure" in Baptism. The inward, spiritual blessing that "answers" to it is "a good conscience toward God." From these and many other portions of Scripture, we can have no doubt that the primary idea suggested by the sign of water in Baptism, is the cleansing, or washing away of spiritual uncleanness.

When, therefore, water is thus presented to our view in the initiatory sacrament of the Gospel, it forcibly suggests three great lessons to our minds:—

1. That by nature, and of ourselves, we are unclean in the sight of God.

2. That to be admitted into the fellowship of God we must be cleansed.

3. That a fountain has been opened up for all sin and uncleanness.

It is true, indeed, that Baptism does not expressly tell us what the pollution is which defiles us, nor yet the means by which it may be cleansed away. But the pictorial illustration again refers us to the Book which it illustrates for further information. Turning, then, to the Scriptures, we there find that our spiritual uncleanness is twofold:—Legal and Personal. We are obnoxious to the law and justice of God, by reason of wicked deeds that we have done; and we are obnoxious to His holy nature, by reason of polluted desires that live in us. Our past guilty deeds deserve and demand punishment; and our indwelling pollutions deserve and demand exclusion from the presence of the

Holy One. Not less plainly do the Scriptures describe the means by which this twofold uncleanness may, and alone can, be washed away, —*viz.*, by the blood and Spirit of Christ. The atoning blood of Christ removes our legal uncleanness, satisfies the law and justice of God, delivering us from the punishment due to our sin; and the Holy Spirit of Christ removes our personal uncleanness, satisfies the holiness of God, delivering us from the power and presence of sin, renewing us in the image and likeness of God. In short, the Gospel remedy for our uncleanness is found in the blood of sprinkling, and in the washing of regeneration.

Some have asked which of these is symbolized in the water of Baptism? We answer, neither of them to the exclusion of the other; but both of them as needed by us, and as inseparably conjoined in the plan of the Father, in the purchase of the Son, and in the application of the Holy Ghost. "Jesus Christ came by water and by blood; not by water only, but by water and by blood;" and Baptism points to both. Sometimes one of them, sometimes the other, is spoken of in Scripture as symbolized by Bap-

tism. But often both of them are described as signified by its water. Thus, on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, "Be baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 38).

III. It only remains now to consider the *action* of Baptism. *Water*, the symbol of the Blood and Spirit of Christ, *applied to the body of the recipient.*

As already said, we do not now pause to consider whether the water should be applied to the body by sprinkling, pouring, or dipping. No doubt a shade of difference would be implied in the sign could we with accuracy determine that one or other of these had been specially appointed by Christ and practised by His Apostles. Sprinkling might more prominently suggest "the Blood of Sprinkling;" pouring, the "outpouring of the Holy Ghost;" or, dipping, our "being buried with Christ." * But after all, these are only special aspects of

* Yet the mode of burial in the days of the Apostles could scarcely have suggested this idea.

the one great thought, already described, that cleansing comes by the Blood and Spirit of Christ. Had the manner of the application of the water been of any vital importance—nay, of any real importance—would it not have been as plainly recorded in Scripture, as the mode of celebrating The Lord's Supper. The ambiguity of Scripture in regard to this point seems intended to impress upon our minds that the great *fact* we have to do with is simply that water is applied to the body of the recipient of Baptism. *That* is the *significant* part of the action. To *that* our attention is called. By *that* sign God delivers a message to us. And whether by sprinkling, pouring, or dipping, that sign is preserved. What, then, is its meaning? Its spiritual lesson plainly is that as, whatever virtue there may be in water to cleanse the body from outward impurities, it is valueless to us unless it is applied to our body; even so, whatever virtue there may be in the Blood and Spirit of Christ to cleanse our souls from the impurities of sin, they are valueless to us unless they are applied to our souls. Or, to put it otherwise, as there

must be a personal application of the water of Baptism to our bodies, in order to our being admitted into the fellowship of the visible Church, even so there must be a personal application of the Blood and Spirit of Christ to our souls in order to our being admitted into the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. As it is not enough to be told and to believe that water can cleanse our bodies unless we wash in it, even so it is not enough to be told and to believe that the Blood and Spirit of Christ can cleanse our souls unless we are personally, individually, each one for himself, washed in the Blood and by the Spirit of Christ. In short, the action of Baptism emphatically teaches us that as he is not baptised to whose body the water has not been applied; even so he is not saved to whose soul the Blood and Spirit of Christ has not been applied.

Nay, farther still, as we are called, not merely to look at Baptism, or to listen to its message, but to "receive" and partake of it, it teaches us not only that we *must* be washed in the Blood and Spirit of Christ if we would be saved, but that we *may* if we will. "The

message of reconciliation" is delivered to us in the signs of Baptism, as well as in the words of Scripture. And delivered for the same end, "that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that believing we may have life through His name." Having called us by His word, God also beckons to us by signs.

CHAP. 3.—*Second use of Baptism—an ordinance whose signs seal the truth of all they represent.*

WE have seen that Baptism is an ordinance of significant signs, in which the way of salvation through Christ is set vividly before us for our acceptance. We now proceed to show, that as these signs are of divine appointment, they *seal, or confirm, the absolute truth and inviolable security of all that they signify.* Or, in other words, that "the sign is a seal" (Rom. iv. 11).

As this is a subject in regard to which much ignorance and error prevails, let us first *carefully mark for what purposes a seal is employed by men.*

A seal (used originally instead of a signature) was, and still is, attached either (1.) to a writ-

ten *promise* or statement, to signify that the person whose seal it is will stand to the truth of the promise or statement to which he has attached his seal; or (2.) a seal was, and still is, commonly attached to some *object* or *person*, to signify that the object sealed is the property of him whose seal is attached to it.

These are the two prominent and distinctive uses of a seal, *viz.*, to seal the truth of a promise or statement, or to seal the right of property in any object or person. In both of these we find a seal thus spoken of in Scripture.

1. A written promise or statement is sealed to proclaim its truth.—Neh. ix. 38: "And because of all this, we make a sure covenant, and *write* it; and our princes, Levites, and priests seal unto it." Jer. xxxii. 9, 10: "I bought the field . . . and I subscribed the evidence (*Hebrew*, "I *wrote* in the book") and sealed it, and took witnesses;" ver. 44; "Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe evidence, and seal them, and take witnesses." 1 Kings xxi. 8: "She wrote letters in Ahab's name, and sealed them with his seal." Esther iii. 12: "In the name of King Ahasuerus was it written, and sealed

with the king's ring." Daniel xii. 9: "Go thy way, Daniel; for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end."

2. Persons or things are sealed, to proclaim that they are the property of the person who seals them. Canticles iv. 12: "My spouse is a fountain sealed." Deut. xxxii. 34: "Is not this laid up in store with me, and sealed up among my treasures?" Rev. vii. 3: "Hurt not the earth . . . till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads;" ix. 4: "Hurt not the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, nor any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads." 2 Cor. i. 22: "Who hath sealed us and given us the earnest of the Spirit."

It will be found that the only difficulty connected with the sealing of Baptism occurs in distinguishing between these two uses of a seal; *i.e.*, in determining in which of these meanings Baptism is a seal,—whether it seals the truth of the words of a previous promise or statement, or whether it seals the persons of those who receive it, as the property of Christ the Saviour.

But, in the meantime, and in preparation for

that question, let us carefully *mark what is*, in *both cases, implied by a seal.*

In both cases, the idea prominently implied in a seal is the *truth* and *security* of the thing that is sealed. He who attaches his seal to a written document, whether it contain a statement or a promise, formally proclaims, that to the best of his knowledge, it is true, and engages himself to stand by it. And he who attaches his seal to any object claims it as his property, and proclaims that, to the best of his power, he will maintain its *inviolable security.* It is true that absolute truth and inviolable security are not attainable by the seals of men. A man may dishonestly attach his seal to a statement which he knows to be false, or to a promise which he means to break. Or, honestly, but ignorantly, he may seal that which is not true; or, dishonestly or ignorantly, he may attach his seal to property that does not belong to him. Or, yet again, by fraud or force other men may violate his seal, and rob him of his property. Therefore, as employed by men, all that a seal implies is, that he who affixes it proclaims, that, to the best of his knowledge, the

thing sealed is true, and that, to the best of his power, he will maintain its inviolable security.

But now, if this be the natural and essential idea of a seal, it is obvious, that whatever uncertainty may attach to the seal of weak and erring men, *the seal of God implies absolute truth and inviolable security.* The seal of God cannot be affixed to falsehood or error. Nor can any one, by fraud or force, violate His seal or disturb its security. 2 Tim. ii. 19, "Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth SURE, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His."

This idea of truth and security is what is implied when we speak of Baptism as a seal. And no explanation of it, as a sealing ordinance, can be accepted which weakens or modifies this idea of absolute truth and inviolable security. It is a manifest contradiction to say that anything which is *sealed* by God can be in any degree untrue, or in any measure insecure. For God to say, by sign and seal, that, to the best of His knowledge, some promise or statement is true, is to proclaim its absolute and irreversible truth; and for God to say, by sign and seal, that any

person is His, and that, to the best of His power, He will maintain him in safety, is equivalent to inviolable security.

If this idea of absolute truth and inviolable security is naturally and necessarily implied in the seal of God (and we do not see how it can be denied, without modifying, or altogether explaining away, the ordinary meaning of a seal), it is impossible to believe that Baptism is a seal in the second sense mentioned above, *i.e.*, as sealing the *persons* who receive it. We say it is impossible to believe that in Baptism God proclaims that, to the best of His knowledge, those who receive it are His property in Christ Jesus; and that, to the best of His power, He will maintain them in security. Were this God's meaning in Baptism, we would be shut up to the impious conclusion, that the knowledge of God is faulty, or that His power is feeble. For Scripture and experience abundantly testify that Baptism is not a certain evidence of the truth, or the security, of a Christian profession. Thus we read of Simon Magus, who was "baptized," and yet was found to have "neither lot nor part in the matter,"

but was still "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity;" of Ananias and Sapphira, and of others, who, as members of the visible Church, must have been baptized, and yet of whom it is said, "they went out from among us, because they were not of us." And in our daily experience we see many baptized persons of whom we can only say, that they are the "enemies of Christ, their god is their belly, they glory in their shame."

To suppose that these persons were sealed in Baptism would be to impugn the knowledge or the power of God; to suppose that the Lord did *not* know them that are His, or that He allowed them to be plucked from His hand,—would imply that His seal was falsely applied or was violated by fraud or by force! Such error or feebleness may be consistent with the most solemn seals of weak and erring men; but they would be utterly destructive of the essential idea implied in the seal of God.

If we believe that absolute truth and inviolable security are implied in the seal of God, it is impossible to believe that Baptism seals the *persons* of those who are baptised—

impossible to believe that their Baptism seals the truth or the security of their salvation; for Scripture and experience loudly proclaim that it is not so.

But let us accept the other use of a seal, to which we referred — let us understand that Baptism *seals*, not the persons who receive it, but *the statements or promises which it represents*, and all our difficulties and perplexities on this part of the subject pass away. We easily understand that the doctrines of His Word, which God formally repeats in the significant signs of Baptism, are absolutely true, and inviolably secure. In this point of view we do not need to modify or lower the idea implied by "a seal." We can apply it to Baptism in its natural and strictest sense, saying, that the divinely appointed signs of Baptism are a seal of the truth and inviolability of all the statements and promises which they represent.

But, now, if it be asked, How do the signs of Baptism seal what they represent? we answer:—

In the very nature of things, significant *signs*, which embody and repeat previous or accompanying *words*, are intended and fitted to be a

seal or confirmation of the truthfulness of these words. Thus when the general gives the order to "advance," and accompanies the word of command by pointing to the foe; or the Red Indian formally buries the hatchet; or a friend who calls us to approach, also beckons with his hand; these significant signs are used not only to be an explanation of their words, but also as a seal or confirmation of their truth. This is a *second* natural use of significant signs as used by men in the ordinary transactions of life. A second (we do not say a secondary) use. For, obviously, it is primary, at once in its own importance, in the intention of those who make the signs, and in the estimation of those who see them.

For example, when strangers land on some foreign shore, in presence of angry or alarmed natives, they proclaim their friendly intentions, not only by such *words* as they may deem to be intelligible, but also by such *significant signs* as may express their meaning. They lay down their weapons of offence, they hoist the white flag of peace, they stretch out their naked hands in offered friendship, or hold out glittering articles

as offered gifts. They use these signs, not merely to arrest attention, nor only to explain the meaning of their words, but also to assure the spectators that they may rely on their truth. If, after having allured the natives to draw near, the strangers seized their weapons, and employed them to capture or to destroy those who trusted to their signs of peace, they would be execrated as *doubly* traitors. First, as having violated their *words* of peace, and secondly, and much more, as having violated the *signs* by which they had sealed, or confirmed the truth of their words. This is the emphatic meaning of the Scripture reproach, which speaks of the aggravated guilt of him who "lifted up the heel against him who dipped in the dish with him," and "with a kiss" (both outward signs of peace) betrayed the Son of man. It was the breach of a profession of friendship, which had been sealed by a significant sign.

In the very nature of things, and as appealing to the natural understanding and common usage of men, a significant sign is intended, and is fitted, to be a seal or confirmation of the

truth of all it represents. And so it is that God, availing Himself of this familiar and easily-understood usage of men, has given to us the signs of Baptism, not merely to arrest our attention to the salient lessons of His Word, or to explain their meaning, but also to assure us of their absolute truth.

This, then, is what we mean when we speak of Baptism as a sealing ordinance. It *signifies* certain things—*i.e.*, it represents them by significant signs; and as these signs are of Divine appointment, they seal or confirm the absolute truth of all they represent. There is nothing mysterious or enigmatical in this idea of Baptism. It is natural and simple, yet, at the same time, it is most solemnly impressive and thrilling. Thus understood, the trumpet gives a clear and certain sound, which none can mistake or doubt. The idea is simply this—*viz.*, that necessarily, and in the very nature of things, a significant sign is intended to be a seal of the truth of all it represents. *The sign is a seal.* The significant sign is itself intended and fitted to serve the purpose of a seal—is, in effect and intention, equivalent to a seal. It is a *natural* seal.

Not, then, in any arbitrary, or artificial, or mysterious manner, but in the very nature of things, and as appealing to the common understanding and universal usage of men, the signs of Baptism seal the absolute truth and inviolable security of all they represent. They do so, not only because they repeat God's promise, but especially because they repeat and reduplicate His promise in the form of outward visible signs. A significant *sign* is a natural seal of all that it signifies. It embodies and expresses what it seals. "*The sign is a seal*" (Rom. iv. 11).

To illustrate this thought, to show its simplicity and solemnity, let us recall to our minds some of the more important lessons taught in the signs of Baptism as formerly explained.

1. Does the *element of water* signify, that, by nature and by wicked works, we are unclean? that, as unclean, we are unfit for the fellowship of God? and that a fountain is opened up for all sin and uncleanness in the blood and by the Spirit of Christ? Are these doctrines of the Word of God set forth in the signs of Baptism? Then the signs are a seal of their absolute and inviolable truth.

2. Does the *action of washing with water* signify that, to have fellowship with God, we must be personally, severally, each one for himself, washed in the blood and by the Spirit of Christ? and that God is able and willing thus to wash all who draw near to Him in faith? Is this set forth in the signs of Baptism? Then this also is a sealed truth.

These doctrines of God's *Word*, being thus repeated in signs of God's appointment, are set before us as absolutely and inviolably true. They were true before—true when merely revealed by the words of God's mouth. But "God, willing more abundantly to show to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath (by a SIGN), that, by two immutable things in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us," in the intelligible words of Scripture and in the significant signs of Baptism (Heb. vi. 17, 18). The message proclaimed in Baptism in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and proclaimed by signs which repeat the message of His

Word, is absolutely true, both in its warning as to what we are and need, and in its promise of what God will do for those who draw near to Him. Believe them or deny them who may, they are sealed truths. The signs are a seal of all they signify.

Let it, then, be carefully observed, that Baptism was intended and is fitted to assure *all* who see, or partake of it, that its message is true. As the Scriptures are a *verbal*, so Baptism is a *symbolical*, proclamation of what we are by nature, of what we need to restore us to the fellowship of God, and of what God is able and willing to do for all who draw near to Him through Christ. This God has said in His Word, and sealed by the signs of Baptism. It is true in regard to all men. Whether we believe or deny it, it is true. Neither the ignorance, nor the unbelief of men can make void the truth of God. Though we deny Him, He is faithful and will not deny His words nor disown His seal. Baptism, then, seals the truth of its message to all who see it. It assures them that its message is true, whether it speaks of what men are in them-

selves, or of what God is willing to do to those who draw near to Him.

But, plainly, this message speaks condemnation to all men as they are by nature and apart from Christ, and speaks of salvation to those only who draw near to God through Christ. To the one it is the savour of death, to the other the savour of life. Baptism does indeed seal salvation to a certain *class of persons.* It seals the promise of salvation to those who draw near to be washed in the Blood and by the Spirit of Christ. But the mere reception of Baptism does not indicate who these persons are. It seals the salvation, not of all who are Baptised with the outward symbol of water, but of all those, and of those alone, who are washed in the Blood and by the Spirit of Christ. To suppose it otherwise, would be to make Baptism belie and contradict itself. For it proclaims that the Blood and Spirit of Christ is the only remedy for sin. And shall we say that the water of Baptism is sufficient? That the sign is sufficient without the reality? The Word of God, like a finger-post with its inscription, tells that Jesus is "The way, the

truth and the life." And the signs of Baptism are God's seal assuring us that that message is true. The truth of that message is *sealed to all* who see or partake of the sign of Baptism. But neither the reading of the Word, nor the reception of the sign of Baptism, can save us, unless we understand, and believe, and obey their message by personally applying to the Saviour of whom they testify.

The Word of God promises salvation to all who put their trust in Christ. The sign of Baptism seals the truth of *that* promise. It seals the promise of salvation to all who believe in Christ. But it does not signify, and does not seal, that all who are Baptised are believers. In short, it seals the truth of the *promise* of God that "righteousness cometh by faith," and is "unto all and upon all them that believe." But it does not seal the *persons* who are baptised as believers or as saved. Baptism, then, is to the believer a sign, and, therefore, a seal, that his salvation is absolutely true and inviolably secure. By the signs of Baptism, Christ and the benefits of the new Covenant are sealed to believers.

We say to believers—not merely to those who know that they are believers, but to those who really are so. From various causes (wrong and sinful they may be), men may not always surely know that they have truly and fully accepted, or asked aright for, the mercy of God. But "the foundation of the Lord standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His." It is true, that while they do not know that they have truly believed—and in proportion as they stand in doubt of it, they have not the *comfort* of the seal; but, *if they really are believers*, they have the *security* of the seal. God knows them that are His; He has heard their prayer, and shall fulfil the promise which He made to believers in His Word, and which He has sealed by the significant signs of Baptism. To the *conscious* believer, his Baptism is a sign and seal of his salvation. Well, therefore, may his heart thrill with solemn and ecstatic emotions as often as he thinks of his Baptism, or beholds it dispensed to others.

But as to those who have not believed nor obeyed God's message, nor turned it into their prayer to God, their Baptism is not a sign nor

a seal of salvation to them. On the contrary, it is a sign and a seal to them that, as they are, they are lost, and that if they continue as they are, they must for ever perish in their own corruption. Their Baptism does not shelter them nor modify their danger. It rather aggravates their guilt, deepens their responsibility, and increases their condemnation, as persons to whom the message of God was personally addressed by the vivid signs of Baptism, but who have, nevertheless, despised and rejected it. Since Baptism proclaims that the blood and Spirit of Christ alone can cleanse from sin, Baptism itself proclaims that the washing of our bodies with its water can never be accepted instead of the washing of our souls in the blood and by the Spirit of Christ—that the sign or symbol can never be accepted instead of the reality of which it speaks—that the sacrament of Baptism can never occupy the place, nor do the work, of the Saviour to whom it points.

But now, if, as we have said, Baptism seals, not the *persons* of those who are baptized, but the *truths* which it proclaims, it may be asked,

What need was there to seal the truth of God's Word? The words of Scripture need nothing to confirm their truth. No seal can make them more true or more sure. This is true. But, in condescension to our weakness, and to help us in our unbelief, God has kindly given us the signs of Baptism to assure us of the truth of His words.

What is said of His oath (Heb. vi. 17, 18) may equally be said of the signs of Baptism. "Willing more abundantly to show the immutability of His counsel (of His Word), He has confirmed it by" the signs of Baptism; "that by two immutable things" (*i.e.*, by the Divinely-inspired words of Scripture, and by the Divinely-appointed signs of Baptism), "in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled to the refuge set before us," in the words of Scripture, and again in the signs of Baptism. Yes! the message of God is, in Baptism, not only explained, that we may more clearly know what it is, but also sealed, that we may more firmly believe that so it is.

Here, then, more clearly than ever, we may

see the importance of realizing that the signs of Baptism *are of Divine appointment.* For, obviously, it is only in as far as they are so, that they are of any value, either as an explanation, or as a confirmation, of the message of God. It is only in as far as Baptism is of God's appointment that it is a sign or a seal of God's message. But, on the other hand, when we realize that the ceremonial of Baptism is of Divine appointment, how solemnly impressive is the thought that in it Father, Son, and Holy Ghost speak to us by significant signs, which at once explain the way of life that we may know what it is, and seal its truth that we may believe that so it is! How solemn the thought that, like the words of Scripture, "these things have been" signified "that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through His name!" (John xxi. 31.)

Finally, how solemn is the question that may be addressed to each baptised person! The message of God has been addressed to thee, in common with others of mankind, in the words of Scripture. But it has also been addressed to

thee personally, individually, by the signs of thy Baptism. Hast thou, then, been at pains to understand God's message to thee? Hast thou believed it? Hast thou so believed it as to obey its call? Hast thou, in thy inmost heart, turned God's message to thee into thy prayer to Him? If thou hast done, and art doing this, thy Baptism is a sign and seal of thy salvation. But if thou hast not done this, and unless thou doest it before thou diest, thy Baptism is a sign and seal that thou art lost. In the signs of Baptism the Word has indeed been preached to thee as well as to others; but it has not profited thee, not being mixed with faith in thee when heard by thee (Heb. iv. 2).

When, thus, we have spoken of Baptism as sealing, not the salvation of the *persons* who receive it, but the truth of the *promises* of God, it must not be forgotten that there is such a thing as the sealing, not merely of general promises, but also of individual persons: "Servants of God sealed in their foreheads," of whom God gives charge saying, "Hurt them not;" persons who are "sealed unto the day of redemption," "sealed up as God's treasure."

This is an undeniable doctrine of Scripture, greater and more precious than the sealing of general promises. The sealing of an individual tells, not only of the truth of the promise that believers in Christ shall be saved, but also that the individual is authenticated, and sealed, as a true believer; that he is safe, and shall be kept by the power of God. We rejoice loudly to proclaim that Scripture largely speaks of such a seal. What we have said is that it is not found in Baptism,—not in the outward Baptism of water, but in the inward Baptism of the Holy Ghost. "Now He which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also *sealed us*, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor. i. 21, 22), *i.e.*, "The earnest of the Spirit in our hearts," not the water of Baptism on our bodies—is the seal of God, "sealeth *us:*" and this seal is inviolable, it "stablishes us." "In whom also after ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory" (Eph. i. 13, 14); *i.e.* "In whom also

after that ye believed," not after ye were baptised, "*ye were sealed* with that Holy Spirit of promise; which is the earnest" (not merely an earnest, but the earnest, the only earnest), "of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." That seal is absolutely true, indicating who are "in Christ;" and it is inviolably secure, for it is "the earnest," or first fruits of final "possession;" and this stability is unto the praise of His glory." "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God whereby *ye are sealed* unto the day of redemption." (Eph. iv. 30.)

The distinction is plain. Baptism seals the promise of God. The Holy Ghost seals the persons of men. Baptism seals the truth of the general promise that believers in Christ are safe and shall be saved. The Holy Ghost authenticates individuals as believers, and seals their salvation. The reception of the Holy Ghost is a part possession of the promised gift, and is, therefore, an evidence of present discipleship, and an earnest of final salvation. For "the gift and calling of God are without repentance." "He who hath begun the good

work will perform it unto the day of Christ." Our reception of Baptism is the seal of the general doctrine that believers in Christ are safe and shall be saved. A very precious doctrine, the very foundation of our faith. But the reception of the Holy Ghost is the seal of our present faith, and of our final salvation. It is the fruit and evidence of our faith.

CHAP. 4.—*Third use of Baptism—To apply to believers the Spiritual Blessings which it signifies and Seals.*

WE have seen that the signs of Baptism were intended and are well fitted, (1.) vividly to represent, or describe the message of salvation, that we may clearly see what it is, and (2.) solemnly to seal or confirm its truth, that we may firmly believe that so it is. But now we proceed to shew that it was intended, and is well fitted, *to apply, or convey, to the souls of believers,* the salvation of which it testifies. This is the third use of Baptism, its climax, or culminating point. This use of Baptism is

founded on, and rises out of a right improvement of its other uses, and without it the others are valueless. Mark well the several steps by which we arrive at this crowning benefit from Baptism. On the part of God, He first *shews* us the way of salvation by vivid signs; secondly, He *assures* us of the truth of His message by solemn seals; thirdly, He *applies* or conveys to us its blessings by suitable means. Or, on our part, first we *see* the message of life, as set forth in the signs; secondly, seeing, we *believe* in its truth as confirmed by the seal of God; thirdly, believing in it, we *receive* its promised blessings, as conveyed to us by an ordinance of God's appointment.

Just as it is in regard to the message of God spoken to us in the *words* of Scripture, so is it in regard to the same message when addressed to us in the *signs* of Baptism: we first *see* the meaning of the message: secondly, we thus come to *believe* its truth; and thus, thirdly, we *receive* its blessing.

Simple, obvious, and convincing as this statement may be to many, agreeing with all their ideas of the Gospel of Christ, it is denied by

large portions of the professing Christian Church; *e.g.*, by Romanists and Ritualists of every shade on the one hand, and by Rationalists of every name on the other. Nay, it is to be feared that comparatively few even in Protestant and Evangelical Churches have clearly realised, or firmly grasped this thought in regard to *Baptism*. It is needful, therefore, that we should endeavour to state and illustrate it with some precision.

Is Baptism an appointed means of conveying or applying salvation to the souls of men? If so, to whom? and to what extent? or in what way?

There is a widespread belief that somehow, and to some extent, Baptism was intended to convey, or apply to the souls of men, the blessings which it represents. This belief naturally arises from the fact that in its celebration we not only behold, but also receive its signs; the water is not only seen by us, but is also applied to our bodies. The ceremonial symbol thus seems naturally to signify that the *application* of water to the body represents the *application* of its blessings to the soul. And

many passages of Scripture seem to countenance this idea, *e.g.*, "He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved" (Mark xvi. 16); "Repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts ii. 38); "Arise and be baptised, and wash away thy sins" (Acts xxii. 16); "The like figure whereunto Baptism doth now save us" (1 Peter iii. 21).

These, and many such like passages of Scripture, plainly intimate that Baptism was intended somehow, and to some extent, to apply, or convey the blessings which it represents.

Some there are (Romanists and Ritualists) who carry this idea so far as to suppose that the mere outward dispensation of Baptism, by a duly qualified person, infallibly and invariably conveys grace to the soul; that the application of the water of Baptism to the body of the recipient, conveys the grace of God to his soul. This is the climax of that mysterious, magical, mechanical idea of Baptism, to which we have so often alluded. It is condemned by reason, by Scripture, and by our

own experience. Reason revolts from all that is purely mysterious, magical, or mechanical in religious worship. We feel that, as God is a Spirit, they who worship Him must worship Him in spirit, or it is not in truth; must worship Him not in spirit only, but "with understanding," and "in the spirit of a sound mind." Reason revolts from the idea of salvation being conveyed to the souls of men by the mere mechanical process of applying water to their bodies. The Scriptures, also, and our own experience, point to many cases in which no spiritual change was effected in persons who were baptised. No! there is no virtue in Baptism itself nor in him who administers it, to convey grace to those who are baptised.

Yet, let it be observed, that in condemning the above superstitious idea of the infallible efficacy of Baptism to *all* who receive it, many fall into the opposite error of supposing that it was not intended to be a means of applying grace to the souls *of any*. The truth lies between these extreme opinions. It is simply this, that Baptism is a means of applying, or conveying grace to the souls of men in the

same sense, in the same way, and to the same extent, as The Word and Prayer. "Christ communicates the benefits of redemption" by outward and ordinary means. These outward means are "His ordinances, especially The Word, Sacraments, and Prayer." And all these are means of conveying grace in the same sense, in the same way, and to the same extent.

How, then, does the Word of God become an effectual means of salvation? "The Spirit maketh the Word an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness, *through faith*, unto salvation." By the *intelligible words* of Scripture, the Holy Spirit "convinces us of our sin and misery, enlightens our minds in the knowledge of Christ, renews our will, and, so, persuades and enables us to *embrace* Jesus Christ freely offered to us in the Gospel." The process by which The Word of God is made effectual to salvation is, that by the use of intelligible words, the Holy Spirit works faith in us and thereby unites us to Christ. Unless, therefore, we understand the meaning of the words of Scrip-

ture, and believe their message, they are valueless to us. They are simply outward means which The Holy Spirit employs to awaken, strengthen and exercise our faith in Christ. Without that faith the Words of Scripture fail to bless us. As it is written, "The Word was preached to them even as to others; but it did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it" (Heb. iv. 2). There is no magical or mechanical virtue in the words of Scripture, nothing in them that can impart a blessing to those who do not understand their meaning nor believe their message.

In like manner, in regard to prayer, there is no cabalistic, magical, or mechanical virtue in the words we utter. To prevail in prayer, we must pray "with understanding"—"in the Spirit," and with "Faith." However excellent the words may be which we use, they are valueless unless they are the intelligent, believing, and true expression of our desires.

And where, now, is the difference in regard to the efficacy of Baptism, whether we regard it as a proclamation of God's message to us, or as the expression of our prayer to Him?

The only difference is in the outward medium of our communication. In Scripture and in prayer *words* are employed, in Baptism *signs*. In Baptism The Holy Spirit makes use of significant signs for the selfsame ends as in the Scriptures He employs intelligible words, *viz.*, to work faith in us and thereby to unite us to Christ, by awakening, strengthening and exercising our faith in Christ. He persuades us to turn God's message to us into our prayer to Him. And who shall say that, where God's faithful message and man's believing prayer meet together, the promised blessing is not given? Who can deny that the signs of Baptism, when they awaken or exercise our faith in Christ, are, like the words of Scripture, outward means which convey inward grace to the soul? Convey it, we do not say to the baptised, but to those who "believe and are baptised" (Mark xvi. 16). Of the dispensation of Baptism, as truly as of the preaching of the Word, it may be said in regard to many, "Baptism was dispensed to them as well as to others; but it did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that received it"

(Heb. iv. 2). Baptism, as "a Sacrament, is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein by sensible signs Christ and the benefits of the New Covenant are *applied to believers.*" It is "made effectual not from any virtue in it, nor in him that doth administer it, but by the blessing of Christ, and the effectual working of His spirit *in them that by faith receive it.*" "By Baptism we are not after a corporal or carnal manner, but *by faith*, made partakers of Christ." In short, like The Word and Prayer, Baptism is a means of conveying inward grace, only in as far as, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, it is made a means of awakening, strengthening or exercising an intelligent *faith* in Christ. It signifies, it seals, it applies the salvation of Christ to *believers.*

There is, perhaps, nothing that more tends to confuse and perplex our minds in regard to the efficacy of Baptism than the common belief that its benefit is coincident with, and limited to, the time of its celebration. This idea tends greatly to encourage, perhaps lies at the root of, the idea that there is some mechanical or magical virtue attached to it. But if, as we

have said, the blessing of Baptism comes through *faith*, it is obvious that the blessing is coincident with the time, not of our outward Baptism, but of our inward faith in Christ.

It is thus with the blessings that flow from reading or hearing the Word of God. The words of Scripture heard, or read, or committed to memory in early youth, may not be understood nor believed by us, yet in after years their meaning may flash upon our minds, may be believed and obeyed by us. Now, just as the benefit of the *words* of Scripture is not necessarily coincident with the moment of time when first we hear them, but only with the time when their message is understood and believed by us, precisely so is it also with the *signs* of Baptism. Whenever, with believing heart, we appropriate their message, and turn it into our prayer to God, then they convey grace to our souls—as soon, and no sooner—as often, and no oftener. Thus we see that "the needful but much neglected duty of improving our Baptism should be performed by us all our life long, especially in times of temptation, and when we are present at its administration to others."

Reader! hast thou thus improved thy Baptism? Art thou daily striving thus to benefit by it? Hast thou used its signs to enable thee more clearly to *see* what the way of God's salvation is? Hast thou used its seal to enable thee more firmly to *believe* in the Saviour to whom it points? Hast thou turned its message into thy prayer to God, asking that as the water has been *applied* to thy body, so the Salvation of which it speaks may be applied to thy soul? In short, hast thou from thy very heart responded to the call God addressed personally to thee? If so, if God's message to thee, and thy prayer to God have thus met together, canst thou doubt that thy prayer has been heard, and His promise fulfilled?

Is it so with thee? Then, when the memory of past sins comes up to threaten and alarm thee, say, "I am baptised, not with symbolical water alone, but with the blood of sprinkling. Washed from my sins by the blood of Christ, who is he that condemneth me?" When temptations rise to allure thee to further sin, say, "I am baptised, not only outwardly with water, but inwardly by the Holy Ghost; and shall I defile

my garments by the filth of sin? or grieve the Holy Spirit by whom I am sealed to the day of Redemption?" Thou art washed, yet remember that, though thou art washed, it still needs that the Saviour should daily gird Himself with the towel to wash thy feet.

But if, on the other hand, thou hast not understood the message of God as set forth in the signs of Baptism, nor believed it, nor turned it into thy prayer to God, thy Baptism stands as a witness against thee. It says, Oh! thou wicked servant, thou knewest, or mightest have known the way of life; it was proclaimed to thee in the words of Scripture, and by the signs of Baptism, but thou hast despised and rejected it.

Yet, even yet, it is not too late. The *symbolical* rock with its gushing water may have long been out of sight, but the "*Spiritual Rock*" still "follows thee." (1 Cor. x. 4.)

> "Still heaven is raining angels' bread
> To be our daily food,
> And fresh as when it first was shed
> Springs forth the Saviour's Blood."

The symbol is past and lost to view, but the

Saviour of whom it spake is beside thee still, "the same yesterday, to day and for ever." This old, this oft repeated sign of Baptism still pleads with thee, saying, "To-day,—even after so long a time—to-day if *thou wilt* hear His voice, harden not thy heart."

Reader! fewer words might have served to make thee *understand* the simple lessons of thy Baptism. But all these have been too few if they have not persuaded thee to comply with the call of God.

PART II.

THE USES OF INFANT BAPTISM.

CHAP. 1.—*Statement of the difficulty connected with this subject.*

DID WE believe, with Rationalists, that, in the case of adults, Baptism was designed merely to be a symbol of admission to outward ecclesiastical privileges; or, did we believe, with Romanists and Ritualists, that an inward and spiritual blessing attends the mere outward administration of the rite, there would be no difficulty in understanding that in the same way, and to the same extent, Baptism may be equally of use to our infant children. But if, as in the former part of this treatise, we reject both of these ideas of Baptism; if, in opposition to Rationalists, we believe that

Baptism was designed to be a means of inward spiritual grace in the case of adults ; and if, in opposition to Romanists and Ritualists, we believe that it is a means of inward grace only in as far as it awakens, strengthens, or exercises Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ ;—the question at once arises,—*How, then, can Baptism be of any spiritual use to infants who are incapable of exercising that intelligent faith which is essential in the case of adults?*

Some there are who endeavour to solve this obvious difficulty by speaking of Infant Baptism as if, in its uses and mode of operation, it were an ordinance distinct and different from Adult Baptism. Rejecting the Rationalistic and the Ritualistic idea in the case of adults, they resort to one or other of these ideas to explain the use of Baptism in the case of infants. On the one hand, some fall back on the Ritualistic idea, that a mysterious and inexplicable efficacy attends the mere administration of the rite in the case of infants, who are incapable of faith ; while, on the other hand, revolting from this idea, others fall back upon the Rationalistic idea that, in the case of

infants, Baptism is merely a symbol of admission to outward ecclesiastical privileges: thus, on either hand, virtually making Infant Baptism to be a new, a distinct, and a peculiar ordinance as far as regards its uses and mode of operation. In support of either of these ideas of Baptism, it would be absolutely essential that very express and distinct evidence should be produced from the Word of God. We believe that the assertion of such ideas lie at the root, and are the cause, of all the objections that have been taken against the Baptism of infants, and that with such views it would not be easy to show any warrant in Scripture for the institution of an ordinance of such new and peculiar uses and modes of operation for infants.

But, in opposition to all such ideas of the use of Infant Baptism, we believe, and now desire to show that, whether in the case of adults or of infants, Baptism is essentially the same ordinance; that the same principles of explanation of its uses and mode of operation are equally applicable in both cases; and that all the difficulties which attach to the Baptism of infants equally attach to any

other means of grace which we may use in their behalf.

If this can be shewn, it is obvious that it will, in *the first place*, enable those who acknowledge the lawfulness of Infant Baptism intelligently to apply themselves to derive from it that comfort and instruction which it is fitted to impart. And, *secondly*, the removal of an obvious difficulty will smooth the way to a more dispassionate consideration of the Scriptural argument in favour of Infant Baptism. Strictly speaking, the former of these alone falls within the scope and purpose of this treatise. But, for the satisfaction of those who may desire it, we shall add a short statement of the general line of the Scriptural argument for the Baptism of infants.

CHAP. 2.—*The same principles which explain the spiritual uses of Adult Baptism shown to be equally applicable in the case of Infants.*

IN seeking to answer the question how Baptism can be a means of inward grace to infants who are incapable of faith, it must be carefully

remembered that this question raises a difficulty of far wider application than to Baptism alone. It equally raises the difficulty, how can any means that we employ be of use to our infant children? In the case of adults, we can in some measure understand how the Holy Spirit can apply salvation to their souls by working in their minds an intelligent faith in Christ, whether by means of intelligible words or by significant signs. In some degree, and to some extent, we can understand this process. But it is, and ever must remain, an insoluble mystery to us, how the Holy Spirit applies the salvation of Christ to the souls of infants, apart from all intelligence or faith on their part.

Thus far, then, we admit that the cases of Adult and of Infant Baptism are not parallel, and that the same principles are not applicable to both. But, we wish it to be observed that this involves a difficulty which is *not peculiar to Baptism*, but equally attaches to every outward means of grace we may use for the spiritual benefit of our infant children. It is not a difficulty confined to their Baptism, but one that

equally attaches to all our efforts and all our prayers on their behalf; nay, which extends to the possibility of their salvation. The difficulty springs from and centres in their *infancy*, and must attach to every means of grace which may be used for them. If, then, we are prepared to say that no means of grace can be of use to our infants; and, therefore, that none have been appointed, or should be employed by us, we may deny the propriety or lawfulness of Infant Baptism. But, if we admit that other outward means of grace have been appointed, may be blessed, and should be used in behalf of our infant children, the difficulty in regard to the manner in which the blessing is given, apart from intelligence and faith, is no objection to the *Baptism* of infants, for it is common to all the rest. It is a difficulty, not peculiar *to Baptism*, but which belongs *to infancy*. There is, and there always must be, an essential difference between the way in which the Holy Spirit works in the minds of an intelligent adult and of an unconscious child. In both there is a point where His mode of operation is mysterious and inexplicable to us. In the case of infants,

where there is no intervention of intelligence or of faith, the point of mystery is sooner reached. But in both it equally meets us, and is inexplicable.

What we propose, then, to show, and nothing more can be fairly required of us, is that, as Baptism is a means of grace to adults in the same sense and in the same way as the Word or prayer is *to them*, even so Baptism is a means of grace to infants in the same sense and in the same way as the Word and prayer are *to them*. Neither in the case of adults, nor of infants, are we required, nor are we able, to explain the way in which the Holy Spirit blesses the use of Baptism, *further than* we are required, or are able to explain how He blesses the use of the Word and of prayer. We are not required to analyse or explain the secret working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts either of adults or infants. It will be enough if we can show that, in whatever sense or way the Word and prayer may be of use to unconscious infants in the same sense and in the same way Baptism may be blessed to them.

1. Then, let us consider *if the Word of God*,

which proclaims His message, is of any use to our infant children? If so, how, and in what way?

To adults, the Word or message of God made known in the Scriptures, is of use as a means of awakening, strengthening, and exercising an intelligent faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Is it, then, of no use to our infant children, who are incapable of intelligent faith?

Directly, the Word of God is of no use to our infant children. Though read aloud over their cradle, though placed on their bosom, or tied round their neck, the words of Scripture would not benefit them. No magical power attends the utterance of the words of Scripture to an unintelligent mind; nor will their application to the body of an infant work as "a charm." We absolutely reject such an idea as an idle and degrading superstition, in regard to adults and to infants alike. In like manner, we as emphatically disown the idea, that the mere outward application of the water of Baptism to the bodies of our infants can impart any spiritual blessing to their souls. We absolutely reject the idea that any spiritual blessing at-

tends the mere outward administration of Baptism apart from intelligence and faith, as an empty and irrational superstition, as much in the case of infants as of adults. There is nothing to warrant us to believe that the words of Baptism, accompanied by its signs, spoken over an unconscious infant, are more efficacious than the words of Scripture are.

But is the Word of God of no use to infants? Yes: *indirectly* the Word of God is the richest inheritance of infants. To parents the Word of God proclaims God's message, directing them how they should treat and train these immortal beings whom He has committed to their charge, telling them what their children are, and what they need, what dangers beset them, what He is willing to do to them, and what He wishes to be done for them. To be the child of Christian parents, who have the Word of God in their hands, and who take it as their rule in the upbringing of their children, is the richest inheritance a child can have. It influences his whole career in time and eternity.

But now, in the same sense and in the same way, Baptism benefits them. Its vivid signs

proclaim God's message. By a few simple, vivid signs, God spreads before the eyes of their parents, and imprints on their memory, the substance of His message—its grand leading features. By signs so short that he who runs can read them; so simple, that the wayfaring man, though a fool, may understand them; and so authoritative, that none can dispute their lessons, God speaks to parents at the Baptism of their infant children, saying, "Your children are unclean and unfit for fellowship with me: their birth of Christian parents has not cleansed them; their Baptism with water cannot cleanse them. They need to be, and may be, washed in the blood, and by the Spirit of Christ. That is my message to them: see, then, that you teach it to them, that, in after years, with their earliest understanding, they may pray that it may be so done to them. And it is my message to *you*, assuring you that, even in the years of unconscious infancy, you may pray for them.

The signs of Baptism, indeed, teach no new lessons, nor add any new directions to the message written in the words of Scripture; but its signs make the words of Scripture

plainer and more impressive to the Christian parent. And in proportion as the parent is taught to discharge his duty, his infant children reap the benefit. Thus far, then, we see that Baptism is of use to infants in the same way and to the same extent as the Word.

But we come far short of the meaning and use of Baptism, when we merely think of it as a proclamation of the message of God, corresponding to the Word of God. It is also intended to be an expression of our desires, corresponding to prayer. Let us consider its use, in the case of infants, in this point of view.

2. *Is prayer* for our infant children of no avail? They cannot pray, nor take part in our prayers. They do not understand the words of our prayers, nor are they conscious of what we do as we kneel down beside their cradle. To them it is as meaningless an action as when we hold them up to be baptised. Yet what Christian parent is there who does not pray for his infant children, from, and all through, their earliest and most unconscious years? Encouraged by many a promise, and emboldened by many a command of the Word of God, pa-

rents pray for their unconscious infants, and expect an answer. Though they cannot communicate their thoughts to their infant children by the words they use, they believe that the Spirit of God can directly communicate with the spirit of their little ones; and that in infancy, nay, from their mother's womb, they can be filled with the Spirit. With faith, and hope, and joy, they delight to present their children in prayer to God. They know that it is the prayer of *faith* that prevails. But though their infant children cannot pray, nor are capable of faith, yet *they* pray, and pray in faith, and expect an answer in God's own time and way.

But where, now, is the difference, or the shadow of a difference, when, in Baptism, they present their infant children to God? Taught by the Scriptures, they take its *words*, or such *words* of their own as may best express its meaning, and turn God's message regarding their children into a prayer for them. And is it not the same, when taught by Baptism they take its *signs*—the very signs by which God proclaims His will, and return them to God as

the expression of their desires in behalf of their children? The only difference is, that Baptism is a prayer expressed, not by words, but by significant signs. But there is no more difficulty in believing that God will answer a prayer of *signs* than a prayer of *words*. Indeed, there is more encouragement. For in the prayers we offer in words of our own selection, and for things that we think best, there may be, there must be, much of error. We may not always ask things according to His will. But since the signs of Baptism are of Divine appointment, they point to things according to His will—to the very things which our infant children need—to the things which He bids us ask for them, and which He desires to give.

If, then, the prayers of Christian parents are beneficial to their infant children—and who can doubt that they are?—how precious is Infant Baptism, which reminds parents of their duty, calls them to its performance, and directs them what to teach, and what to ask for their children! We now can well understand how a Christian parent's bosom thrills with solemn and ecstatic emotion when, like Mary (Luke ii.

22), he "presents his child to the Lord," by signs of God's appointment. Thomas Boston well described such emotions: "As I wrote to Mr. Wilson to come to baptise my child, my heart fluttered away to Christ with my child, and I wept for joy, that the covenant was for my children as well as for myself."

Christian parent! hast thou thus understood the Baptism of thy child? Hast thou seen in its signs God's message to thee, telling thee what thy child was by birth, what he needed, and what thou shouldst ask for him, and teach him, in after life, to ask for himself? Believing and receiving that message, didst thou return God's message to Him in the form of thy prayer, asking that it might be done unto thy child even as the signs of Baptism signify? Art thou still doing so, still holding up thy child, as it were, in thy arms for the inward, spiritual blessing? Art thou fulfilling thy solemn promise by labouring to teach him the message which, in his infancy, God gave to thee to deliver to him? Then, if the signs of Baptism have been appointed by God to be administered to infants, thou mayest surely

expect that, in due time, and in God's own way, the answer shall be given. To the believing parent, who thus uses it, Baptism is a sign and seal, that if his child is spared to the years of intelligence, he will be taught to pray for himself with acceptance. Or, that, if called away in infancy, a believing parent's prayer will be accepted in his behalf. To parents, and through them to their infant children, Baptism is thus easily seen to be an inestimable boon. To the believing parent, Infant Baptism rightly used

> "Is the breath of God in man,
> Returning whence it came."

But now let us carefully observe what this view of Infant Baptism implies. It implies that whether in the case of adults or of infants, the blessing and benefit of Baptism (like the blessing of circumcision, or of the Word, or of prayer), comes by faith and through believing. To the adult through his believing prayer for himself, or to the infant through the believing prayer of his parents. In the case of an ignorant parent, who neither understands nor be-

lieves God's message, the Baptism of his infant child is as meaningless as valueless, as much a mockery of God, as the words of prayer are which he reads from a book, or repeats by rote, without understanding or believing what he says.

We do not say that grace or salvation is denied to the child, because of the ignorance or unbelief of his parents. What we say, is, that in such a case, *Baptism* is not a means of conveying it.

Thus far we have only considered the benefits which our infant children may derive from Baptism *in their infancy*, and ere they can understand or believe its message. But now we proceed to consider what lessons they may learn *in after years*, from the fact that they were baptised in infancy.

We have seen that in infancy our children may receive much benefit by the impression their Baptism made on *the minds of their parents*, stirring them to pains and prayers for their helpless little ones. But, at first sight, it may appear as if children baptised in unconscious infancy lose much of the impression that

would have been made on *their own minds* if the ceremony had been delayed till they could understand it. And there might be some measure of truth in this idea if the blessing of Baptism were limited, or tied up, to the moment of its celebration, or, if its signs were only significant or true at the time when they were visibly before the eye. But we have already seen that it is not so. We have seen that the divinely appointed signs of Baptism are as true, and ought to be as impressive, when they are remembered or realised long years afterwards, as when at first they were dispensed. The *words* of Scripture written 1800 or 2000 years ago, are as true and as impressive as of old. And the *signs* by which God spake to us at our Baptism in our infancy, are as true and as impressive as if we had been baptised to-day. God will stand to the signs He gave to us in infancy, as surely as if He had given them to-day.

For example, if our beloved Queen, years ago had entered some peasant's house near her Highland home, as she is wont to do, and, seeing a smiling infant in its cradle, had

spoken some kindly *words* of promise to provide for its future welfare; and as a *sign and seal*, as a token and pledge of that promise, had left a medallion or locket in the hands of the parents for the child, that sign would have encouraged the parents during the infancy of their child to send to the palace to ask for help in times of urgent need. And though given in infancy, it would in after years be as impressive and as assuring to the child then grown to manhood, as if it had been given to himself in the years of intelligence.

Just so it is with the signs of Baptism. No matter when they were given to us, whether in infancy or manhood, whenever we realise and understand their meaning, they are equally true and impressive; whether seen or remembered by us they equally proclaim what God's message to us is, and what our prayer to Him should be.

Nay, for some important practical purposes, our Baptism in infancy is more impressive than in adult years. For example, it supplies a strong argument to deep repentance. Didst Thou, O God, in my infancy, and at my Bap-

tism, proclaim that even then I was unclean and unfit for fellowship with Thee; that my being born of Christian parents did not make me clean (Psalm li. 5); that my Baptism with water could not cleanse me; that I needed to be washed in the Blood and by the Spirit of Christ? How much more unclean am I now, after long years of wilful sin how much more do I need to be washed in the Blood and by the Spirit of Christ! From the early morning of my infancy Thou didst call me to enter Thy vineyard, didst teach my parents to pray for me and plead with me, but how sadly have I neglected Thee, how slow have I been to obey! Is it not plain that the fact of our Baptism in infancy thus becomes a powerful and impressive call to repentance? But, it also proclaims a new ground of encouragement. O God, in the days of my infancy, ere yet I had done good or evil, ere I had done any good deeds to deserve Thy favour, and, in full view of all the misdeeds I have done, Thou didst send Thy message of mercy to me. And, now, in this I see a sign and seal of Thy word of promise that salvation is not of works, but of

Thy free grace. Naked as I came from the womb, Thou didst send Thy message to me; and now, as naked, as destitute, as helpless, I obey Thy call, and come to Thee.

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy Cross I cling;
Naked flee to Thee for dress,
Helpless look to Thee for Grace;
Guilty, to the Fountain fly,
Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

Thus we see that the signs of Baptism are not less, but in some respects are more, impressive to those who have been baptised in infancy than to those who are baptised in later years.

Mathew Henry bears this emphatic testimony to the benefit of Infant Baptism—a testimony to which multitudes have set their seal:—"For my own part, I cannot but take occasion to express my gratitude to God for my infant Baptism, not only as it was an early admission into the visible Church of Christ, but as it furnished my pious parents with a good argument for an early dedication of *my own self* to God in my childhood. If God has wrought any

good work upon my soul, I desire, with humble thankfulness, to acknowledge the *moral* influence of my infant Baptism."

Reader! hast thou ever used thy Baptism thus? If so, then its water is a sign and seal from God that thou hast an interest in that better washing of which it speaks. But if thou hast refused or neglected to obey the message of God delivered to thee in Baptism, its waters are to thee an emblem of the *tears* of Christ as now He weeps over thee, saying, as of old, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often *would I* have gathered you, but *ye would not!*" "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." But "they *will not* come unto me, that they might live." "Turn ye, turn ye, for *why will ye* die?"

CHAP. 3.—*Brief statement of the Scriptural argument for Infant Baptism.*

WE have endeavoured to show that Infant Baptism, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, is well fitted to be a means of inward grace. We have endeavoured to do so from several points

of view; *e.g.*, as regards parents in the upbringing of their children; as regards our children in their infancy, and in after years. But now, in proportion as we realise these possible uses of Infant Baptism, we are naturally led to inquire, Is there any warrant in Scripture to believe that the Baptism of infants has been approved of by God, that it is one of His appointed means of grace? Whatever "show of wisdom" there may be in Infant Baptism, it is valueless if its administration is merely "after the commandments of men" (Col. ii. 20, 23). It is only if it be according to the commandment of Christ that we may expect that He "will be with us" to bless its administration (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20). "In vain we worship Him, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." Yet, on the other hand, how solemn our responsibility if we neglect or set aside any of His appointed means of grace, or fail to "teach whatsoever He has commanded us!" How solemn especially our responsibility, if we neglect or set aside any means of grace which He has appointed for the benefit of our infant children!

It would be altogether inconsistent with the design and scope of this treatise, to enter fully into a controversial statement of the Scriptural argument in favour of Infant Baptism. Yet, for the comfort and satisfaction of Christian parents, this treatise would be incomplete without a brief statement of the general line of that argument.

In giving such a statement there are two things, relating to the point which needs to be proved, that must be carefully noted.

1st. When we speak of Infant Baptism as an ordinance of God, we do not assert that infants are the *only* fit objects for baptism. On the contrary, we teach, as in Part I., that adults who have not been baptised in their childhood should, and only may, be baptised when they make a credible profession of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The question that remains is, Are Infants also fit objects of Baptism?

2nd. We do not assert that *all* infants should be baptised. We affirm that a credible profession of faith in Jesus Christ is as essential a qualification in infant as in adult Baptism—the faith of the parent who presents his child is as

essential to the blessing of Baptism as the faith of the adult recipient. The question, therefore, is, Are the infants of believing parents (*i. e.*, of parents who would themselves be entitled to baptism) fit objects of Baptism?

Such being the question, the grounds on which we unhesitatingly answer in the affirmative may shortly be stated as follows:—

1. Infant children, while yet incapable of intelligent faith, are capable of receiving spiritual gifts and saving grace, by the inward working of the Holy Spirit of God.

2. It is the natural and earnest desire of all Christian parents to present their infant children in prayer to God, imploring Him, by His Spirit, to bestow these spiritual gifts and that saving grace.

3. In His Word, God has sanctioned and approved of that desire—has commanded us thus to pray for our children from their earliest days, and has encouraged us to believe that such prayers will be heard in their behalf. The *Word* of God describes Jesus as still standing with open arms, and saying, "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not."

4. It is natural to suppose that, as God has given an ordinance of signs, to illustrate and confirm His word of promise to believing adults when they draw near to Him in prayer, He *may* have done so, also, to illustrate and confirm His word of promise to believing parents when they draw near to present their children to God in prayer. The one is not more unlikely than the other. If He has done so in the one case, is it not likely that He has done so in the other? In the case of our infants, our faith *needs* a sign for confirmation as much, nay, more than in the case of adults.

5. This presumption we find actually realised in God's dealings with the Old Testament Church. To believing parents in Old Testament times God gave an ordinance of Signs to illustrate and confirm the words of promise in which He invited them to present their infants to Him. Circumcision, which was a sign and seal that righteousness cometh by faith—circumcision, which Abraham received when he was a believer, and which was to be administered to adults of other nations only when they were proselytes to the Jewish faith

—was by God's command administered to the infant children of those who had been circumcised and continued in communion with the Jewish Church. Thus that which was a natural *presumption*, as we have already said, is seen to have been a *fact* in Old Testament times. The word of promise to parents was confirmed by the sign of infant circumcision as surely as the word of promise to adults was confirmed by adult circumcision. In both cases it was a sign and seal that righteousness cometh, not by circumcision, but by faith.

6. *We are entitled now to ask, When was that proved and precious privilege of Old Testament times withdrawn or abrogated?* The outward form of the sign, like the outward form of the Passover, or the day of the week on which the Sabbath is observed, has been changed. But where is the evidence that the spiritual privilege signified has been withdrawn from Christian parents or their children? Very clear and distinct that evidence would need to be. But there is not in all the Scriptures the shadow of any such evidence, nor the slightest trace or indication of it. While, on the other hand,

there are manifold and convincing indications that the old and much valued privilege has been continued under the new Gospel dispensation. Everything indicates that it was so. Nothing contradicts it. *e.g.* (1), Preaching to Jews, who highly valued the privilege of infant circumcision, Peter said: "The promise is to you and to your *children*" (Acts ii. 39). Language strangely loose and apt to be misunderstood in that first Christian sermon, if under the Gospel, for the first time, children were to be excluded from the initiatory rite by which their parents were that day admitted into the visible Church! (2), Many of the Jewish converts to Christianity were very zealous for the continuance of Jewish rites in the Christian Church, especially for the continuance of circumcision (including infant circumcision). But we nowhere hear of any of them objecting to the exclusion of their children from Baptism. Is it credible that they would all have thus kept silence, or contentedly have surrendered a privilege which they so highly valued for their children, without an explicit prohibition? or is it possible that the

apostles had no occasion to argue the point in their writings? Yet there is no such prohibition, nor argument. The obvious explanation is, that the old privilege which admitted children along with their parents remained unchanged in the early Christian Church. (3), This supposition is confirmed when we read, in several instances, that *households* or families were baptised. If children were excluded it is strange, and fitted to mislead, that without one word of caution the inspired writers employ a word that usually includes them. (4), And, finally, if the infants of the early converts were not baptised, if their children were left unbaptised until they could make an intelligent profession of their faith, is it not strange that, though we have the history of the Church for a period of thirty years, we are not once told of any children of these early Christians as having been baptised in after years? The natural, may we not say the necessary, conclusion is, that we have no such record because there were no such cases, the children having been baptised along with their parents.

In short, to conclude, if the question be, Is there any direct, express, and positive evidence to prove that the privilege enjoyed by parents and children in Old Testament times has been withdrawn by God, and is denied to parents and children in New Testament times? Our answer is, there is not only no direct or positive evidence of this, there is not only no shadow or indication of such a change, but there are many indications that no such change was made. Nay, these indications are of such a character as to imply that no idea of such a change had been broached in these early days. Had it been a subject of dispute or discussion (and of a certainty it must have been if children had then, for the first time, been excluded from the initiatory rite which admitted their parents) the apostles would have had occasion expressly to proclaim the mind of God regarding it on one side or the other. But their silence regarding it, the very absence of express and positive statements on the subject, is the surest proof that the previous privilege of children in circumcision was preserved and continued in Baptism.

In the absence of any express, or implied

prohibition of Infant Baptism, the only conceivable way of escape from the force of this argument, is by affirming that the cases of Baptism and circumcision are not parallel, that while Baptism is exclusively a religious ordinance, and a means of inward grace, circumcision was in no sense a religious ordinance designed for spiritual uses, but exclusively related to outward national rights and external ecclesiastical privileges.

This, however, is a position which is not true in either of its statements. It is true indeed, that the parallel does not hold in regard to *national* rights. And for this simple reason, that while the Jewish Church and the Jewish nation were identically the same, under the old theocracy when the Church was limited to one nation and one land, it is not so now under the New Testament dispensation. Ecclesiastical privileges are not identified with, nor essential to *national* rights.

But with this exception, Baptism and circumcision are exactly parallel. For, first, though our subject has hitherto led us to speak exclusively of the spiritual uses of Baptism,

it is also, as we shall see in Part III., a symbol of external *ecclesiastical* privileges. Like circumcision, Baptism proclaims that he who receives it stands in a certain relation to the Church, that he is entitled to its privileges and care, and that he is bound to obey and conform to its laws. All that is said of circumcision in this point of view, whether as to its obligations or privileges, is equally true of Baptism. And in as far as in this point of view, circumcision was a benefit to the children of Jewish parents, in like manner Baptism is to our infants. Second, though circumcision was thus a symbol of outward ecclesiastical privileges, this was not its only nor its highest use. It was especially designed to be a means of inward spiritual grace. This was its great, its ultimate end. The other was secondary, subordinate, and purely *accidental*. Thus for example, we are told that Abraham received the sign of circumcision, "*a seal of the righteousness of faith*—of the righteousness which he had being yet uncircumcised," *i.e.*, of the righteousness that he had by believing; as it is written, "Abraham believed God, and it was

counted unto him for righteousness." Nothing more truly spiritual, nothing that more speaks of inward and saving grace, can be said of Baptism. In this respect they are exactly parallel. And so again we read, "He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, neither is that circumcision which is outward in the flesh. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart in the Spirit, and not in the letter." Nothing can more clearly convict those of error who affirm that circumcision was not a means of inward grace, but was only, or even mainly, a symbol of outward ecclesiastical privilege. Nor do these passages stand alone as indicating the intended spiritual uses of circumcision. Both the Old Testament and the New abound in similar statements, intimating that in its *highest* use, the circumcision of the flesh was meant to be a significant, outward sign of the inward circumcision of the heart,—a sign, like Baptism, "not of the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but of the answer of a good conscience towards God." Nothing more spiritual is said of Baptism than is also said of circumcision. And nothing is said of

the necessity of faith to the obtaining of the spiritual benefit of Baptism, that is not equally said of its necessity in obtaining the spiritual benefit of circumcision. If, then, we find a difficulty in understanding how Baptism can benefit our infant children, who are incapable of faith, that difficulty, we do not say is *explained*, but is *removed*, when we learn that circumcision was appointed by God to be a means of inward grace to infants who were incapable of faith. *How* Baptism may be of use to infants incapable of faith, we have endeavoured to show in Chap. 2 of Part II. But that it may be of use to them, though we cannot understand the mode of its operation, is absolutely proven by the parallel case of circumcision. And, ere we can abandon the use of Infant Baptism, express and distinct evidence must be produced from the Word of God to shew that a precious privilege enjoyed by infants in Old Testament times, has been withdrawn, or is denied to our children, under the New Testament dispensation. The difficulty in regard to the use of Baptism to infants, if difficulty it be, is not greater in the case of

Baptism than of circumcision. Abraham "received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith which he had being yet uncircumcised." And so the first Christians received the sign of Baptism, a seal of the righteousness of faith which they had being yet unbaptised. The infant children of believing Abraham were circumcised while yet they were incapable of faith. And so are the children of believing parents in the Christian Church. The parallel is perfect. The privilege is the same, the difficulty is the same.

PART III.

SOME SUBORDINATE BUT IMPORTANT USES OF BAPTISM.

Relation of the Church to the Baptised.

WE have considered the relation which subsists between the baptised and God. We now proceed to consider the relation that subsists between the baptised and the visible or professing Church.

In the former point of view, we have seen that Baptism is an outward sign, which represents the inward process by which men *may be* initiated into the fellowship of God. We have now to consider Baptism as the outward sign by which men *are formally and actually* initiated into the fellowship of the visible Church.

In the former point of view, we have seen that initiation into the fellowship of God is not

effected by the mere outward administration of Baptism, but is entirely dependent on the possession of an inward and living faith in Christ (whether on the part of the adult who presents himself for Baptism, or of the parent who presents his infant child). We have seen that, apart from the possession of such a faith, the mere outward administration of the sign of Baptism is as valueless to any saving effect as the mere utterance of the words of Scripture or of prayer without any believing apprehension of their meaning. But now we must observe, that as men cannot read the secrets of our hearts, a credible profession of faith in Christ entitles the Church to dispense, and us to receive Baptism. That profession may be, often is, mistaken or insincere—a profession of what is not really possessed. Yet, however mistaken or insincere that profession may be, the outward administration of Baptism formally initiates us into the fellowship of the visible Church. By the administration of Baptism a mutual relationship is formed, and is acknowledged as subsisting between the Church which baptises and the persons who are baptised.

That relation is quite different from, and, in its uses, far, very far, short of that inward and saving relation to God of which we have already spoken. It is quite secondary and subordinate to it, and may, and often does, exist without it. But we desire to show that it was designed, and is well fitted, in the hands of the Holy Spirit, to awaken, strengthen, and exercise that inward and living faith by which alone we can be united to Christ, or maintain communion with Him. In short, that this outward relation of the baptised to the visible Church is a powerful and impressive means by which we may be led upwards into that higher and only saving inward relation to God.

In doing this we propose to consider—(I) What the mutual relation is which subsists between the Church and the baptised? (II)—What uses that relationship was designed, and is fitted to serve?

(I.) *What the relation is which subsists between the Church and the Baptised?*

The relation that subsists between the Church and the baptised may be inferred (1) from the *nature* of Baptism itself. Is Baptism in its very

essence a short summary of what the message of God is, and of what our prayer should be? Then, it is obvious, on the one hand, that the Church, in the administration of Baptism, delivers the message of God to the baptised, and makes it her prayer for them; nay, by admitting them to her fellowship, engages to continue to deliver to them the whole counsel of God as known by her, and to continue to pray for them. And, again, on the other hand, the adult who presents himself to the Church for Baptism, and the parent who presents his infant child, proclaim that they receive Baptism as the message of God, and make it their prayer to God, and promise that they shall continue to avail themselves of all those ordinances which God has instituted in His Church for making known His will to men, or their wishes to Him.

By the *administration* of Baptism the Church formally acknowledges and undertakes the duty of teaching and praying for the baptised; and by the reception of Baptism at the hands of the Church, whether it be for ourselves or for our infant children, we acknowledge and undertake

the duty of availing ourselves of all the ordinances of the Church, that we may learn more fully what the message of God is, and what our prayer should be, engaging to make that message the rule of our prayer and of our practice.

(2) That this is not only a natural, but also the Scriptural, idea of the relation that subsists between the Church and the baptised, is plainly seen in the Church's commission to baptise. (Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.) "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptising them; teaching them to do all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo! I am with you alway."

There is here a gradation of successive steps, of which "baptising" is the middle or intermediate step, viz. :—

1. Teach all nations.
2. Baptising them.
3. Teaching them all things. And,
4. Conjoined to this commission is a promise —"Lo! I am with you"—which calls forth the prayer that it may be so.

Now, let us mark this commission—

1st, As a preliminary or preparative for Baptism the Church is commanded to "teach"

all nations. The word translated "teach" in verse 19 is quite a different word from that which in verse 20 is translated "teaching." The margin exactly renders it—"make disciples of all nations," or, more exactly still, *make scholars*, which is the exact meaning of the Latin word *discipuli*. Make scholars of all nations, persuade them to enter themselves as scholars in the school of Christ, to be taught by Him.

2nd, When they consent to this, in token that you undertake to teach them, and that they consent to learn—as an outward, formal acknowledgement of this—baptise them in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. And then,

3rd, Fulfil your duty by "teaching them *all things* whatsoever I have commanded you;" fulfil your duty in teaching them, and let them fulfil their duty in learning all things whatsoever I have commanded you. The duty of the Church in teaching, and of the baptised in waiting on her teaching, extends to "all things whatsoever Christ *has commanded*," but extends no further. And,

4th, Added to all this is the promise,

"Lo! I am with you alway," to remind the Church and the baptised that all their teaching and learning, and baptising or being baptised, is valueless without the blessing of a present Saviour; and thus calling them to add prayer to all their efforts.

In short, then, it appears that the relation which subsists between the Church and the persons she baptises is one in which they mutually acknowledge it to be their duty to teach and to be taught whatsoever Christ has commanded, and mutually pledge themselves to seek a blessing on their efforts by praying to the present Saviour.

This relation to the visible Church is far, very far, short of any inward or saving relation to God. Yet, as we now proceed to show, it is well fitted, and was designed, to lead us up to that higher relation, inasmuch as its "teaching" is well fitted to awaken and exercise faith in our hearts, and its "prayers" to call down the blessing of God.

(II.) *The Uses which this relation to the Visible Church was designed, and is fitted to serve.*

1. Its use to *ministers* who dispense, and to

office-bearers who authorise the dispensation of Baptism.

Realising that the significant signs of Baptism embody, in a short and authoritative form, the grand substance of what God's message to man is, and of what man's prayer to God should be, realising that, in the administration of Baptism, ministers formally profess to deliver that message to men, and to join with them in making that prayer to God, observe,

1st, How solemnly and searchingly ministers should ask themselves, Does our preaching, and do our prayers, accord with this authoritative summary of God's revealed will? Are the great lessons of Baptism the great subject of our discourses and of our prayers? Do we give to the doctrine of the Trinity, of man's natural uncleanness, of redemption through the blood of sprinkling, of regeneration by the washing of the Holy Ghost, of the necessity of a personal application of the blood and Spirit of Christ to the souls of men, and of the freeness with which God invites men to draw near to be washed,—do we give these great elemental truths the prominence in our preaching and

prayers which God has assigned to them, by singling them out and setting them forth in the initial ordinance of the Gospel? Since Baptism exhibits the message which we should deliver to men, and the prayers which we should offer to God, each Baptism we dispense either commends or condemns the doctrine which we preach and the prayers which we offer.

2nd, If ministers in dispensing, and office-bearers in authorising the dispensation of Baptism, deliver the message of God to men, and call on them to turn it into their prayer to God, how solemnly should they ask themselves, Have we been at pains to ascertain that the applicant for Baptism (whether an adult for himself, or a parent for his infant child), understands the message of God, believes it, and desires to obey it by turning it into his prayer to God? Have we fully examined him as to his knowledge to discern the meaning of God's message? And earnestly dealt with his conscience to ascertain whether he honestly receives it as the directory for his prayers and practice?

Is it not a mockery to deliver God's message into the hands of those who do not understand

its meaning? or who do not believe, nor obey its lessons? A mockery, not only in the case of an adult who is required to profess his faith and to promise obedience, but also, and equally, in the case of a parent who is required to profess his faith, and to promise that he will carefully and prayerfully deliver that message to his child, and strive to persuade him to make it his prayer to God.

Yet, let it be observed, that while there are weighty responsibilities lying on ministers and office-bearers, as to whom they *admit*, there are also responsibilities, as great, in regard to those to whom they *deny* that ordinance. A heavy responsibility lies on those who wantonly, recklessly, or from any unworthy motives refuse Baptism to those who are entitled to it in the sight of God, and for whose benefit it was designed, a very heavy responsibility if through passion, or prejudice, or negligence, we deprive them of an appointed means of grace.

3rd, When Baptism has been dispensed, ministers and office-bearers should realise that as in that act they have formally delivered God's message to the baptised, and united with

them in prayer to God, they have bound themselves to care for their souls, and to promote their spiritual welfare, to do so by the continued reiteration of that message and of these prayers. The commission which entitled them to "Baptise" also commands them to "Teach all things whatsoever Christ has commanded." The duty of ministers and office-bearers towards the baptised is not ended when Baptism has been dispensed, in reality it has then only begun. By authorising, and dispensing Baptism, they have publicly pledged themselves diligently to instruct the baptised in the whole counsel of God, and constantly to pray for them. No doubt it is their duty to do this to all within their reach, to "go and teach all nations." But an additional, and very solemn responsibility lies upon them to do so to the baptised. For by baptising them, they acknowledge and accept the responsibility, and solemnly promise in the strength of God, to discharge these duties.

Yet let them not forget that, amid these responsibilities, they have in Baptism a sign and seal that, in the discharge of these duties,

Christ has promised to be "with them," to bless their teaching, and to answer their prayers. Let ministers, and office-bearers, and all who, under them, are engaged in the instruction of children, remember, that while Baptism proclaims their obligation to instruct and to pray for them, it also, and as emphatically, proclaims that the Lord always stands at their side to prosper all their efforts. The sign of Baptism seems to say, "Take this child and nurse it for Me, *and I will give thee thy wages.*" The encouragement is equal to the responsibility. He does not send us this warfare on our own charges, nor require the tale of bricks without providing straw.

II. *Use to Congregations who witness the dispensation of Baptism.*

1. All that has been said in regard to ministers and office-bearers, applies, with some modification, to *congregations* who witness, and participate in, the dispensation of Baptism. The administration of Baptism is an act of the congregation done by the hands of its office-

bearers. The Baptised is admitted into the membership of the congregation—acknowledged as having "one Faith, one Lord, one Baptism," in common with them. It is a very solemn thought that the congregation stand up as *witnesses* of that solemn transaction, when, by the signs of Baptism, God's message is formally delivered to a fellow-creature, and he *turns these signs* into his prayers to God. It is a more solemn thought that they *take part* with the minister in the delivery of that message, and with the recipient of Baptism in the offering of his prayers. But it is more solemn still, to realise that, as witnessing and participating in the dispensation of Baptism, the assembled congregation pledges itself continuously, as opportunity presents itself, *to teach* the Baptised, and *to pray for* them.

How weighty, in this point of view, is the responsibility of congregations—a responsibility that accumulates and increases with each successive Baptism they witness. In each successive Baptism, by visible signs, God says to them, Pray for this *individual.* I invite, I authorise, you to do so. Pray for him now.

Continue to do so. Carefully teach him all whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo! I am with you alway, to the end of the world. Join with this parent as he prays for his infant child, and ever afterwards, through future years, co-operate with him in teaching *this* child.

Thus God speaks to the assembled congregation, reminding them of their duty, and encouraging them to its faithful discharge. And the congregation acknowledge and undertake the duty by taking part in the dispensation of Baptism.

How precious, then, is the privilege of *public*, as distinguished from *private*, Baptism! calling forth, as it does, the united prayers, and the continued efforts of the people of God, in behalf of the Baptised. Strong and powerful the reasons should be that can induce an applicant to forego the prayers and care that are invited and promised by public Baptism. And as strong and powerful should the reasons be that can persuade a pastor to deprive not only the baptised, but also his flock, of the mighty and manifold advantages of public Baptism, in the

face of a witnessing and participating congregation.

2. In witnessing a Baptism each member of the congregation should personally apply its lessons to *himself*. These simple signs, he should say, represent the very rudiments of the Christian Faith—the elements of saving knowledge—what God's message is, and what my prayer should be. That message was delivered to me at my Baptism, and has been repeated in every Baptism I have seen. Have I understood it? Have I believed and obeyed it? Have I turned it into my prayer to God? If I have done so, my own baptism, and every baptism I have seen, is a sign and seal that my prayer has been heard, assuring me that He is faithful who has promised.

If I have not yet obeyed that message, each baptism that I behold reminds me that I am still invited to do so. If never before, yet now at length; or if often before, yet now again let me obey the call of God. I am as destitute of good works to commend me to the favour of God as that little child, and I am laden with

sins which it never knew. "Wash *me*, Saviour, or I die."

What an ordinance of thrilling interest, and of deepest power, would Baptism be, if the entire body of the witnessing congregation were to engage in it in such a spirit as this! The careless and unconverted, who might be present, would feel it to be a sermon more impressive than the lips of any minister could utter.

3. *To parents* who have presented their infants to God in Baptism, how solemnly does each Baptism they witness speak! It recalls to their remembrance the time when they stood where these parents now stand with their little ones—reminds them that the message of God was once delivered thus solemnly into their hands, to be by them made known to their children, and that thus they were invited to pray for them, and that they promised and professed to do so. It asks them, Have you fulfilled your promises, and continued to act according to your profession? Have you been at pains to make known God's message to your children? Have you laboured to make them

understand, believe, and obey it? Have your lives borne witness to the sincerity and earnestness of your lips? Have your works corresponded with and corroborated your words? Have you continued to pray for your children, to pray for the blessings symbolised in Baptism? Do you still hold them up in prayer, as it were, in the arms of Baptism?

If they have been brought to the saving knowledge of God, can you say, have you said, "He hath heard my prayers and the voice of my supplications?" If they are still wayward and careless, have you realised that it may be, that it probably is, because you have been neglectful in teaching, or faithless in praying for them? And, now, realising that this present Baptism of another is a renewal and repetition of the same sign that was given to you, do you never turn it into your prayer for your children, and resolve to deliver its message now to them? In every public Baptism, the Church—nay, God Himself, solemnly reminds Christian parents of their duty, and loudly calls them to discharge it. It is as the voice of the Church—nay, of God Himself, saying, "I gave

thee this child to bring up for Me, and thou didst undertake the charge; hast thou endeavoured, or hast thou neglected, to discharge thy duty? Outward means and inward grace were within thy reach; didst thou use them? If not, shall not "the blood of these poor innocents be required at thy hand? But, now, in the full and faithful discharge of parental duties, thou hast the Word of God, sealed by the sign of Baptism, to assure thee that thy labour shall not be in vain in the Lord. It shall be done unto thee, even as it is said in the words of Scripture and sealed in the signs of Baptism. Thus, if Baptism proclaims the responsibilities of parents, it as loudly discloses their encouragements.

To parents, then, may we not say of Baptism,—

"Is it not like a mother's prayer,
When with her darling on her knee,

She weighs and numbers o'er and o'er,
Love's treasures hid in her fond breast,
To cull from that exhaustless store
The dearest blessing and the best?

And where can mother's bosom find,
With all its deep love-learned zeal,
A prayer so sweetly to her mind,"
As in this holy Sign and Seal?

4. To the *children* who are present in the congregation and witness a public Baptism, especially if it be of an infant child, the administration of this ordinance is full of interest, and is impressively instructive. Its short and simple signs speak more plainly to their eye, than words can do to their ear; or, at least, enable them more easily to understand our words when we explain the lessons of Baptism. The tender age of the child conveys to their minds the idea that here, at least, is a part of the service of the sanctuary with which the youngest of them have to do. It seems to them like the echo of the voice of Jesus saying, "Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not." And all this is made more impressive to their minds when, after united prayer, the whole congregation stand in hushed silence, witnessing and taking part in the formal admission of an infant into the fellowship of the Christian Church.

The eager faces of our children at every Baptism proclaim aloud how deeply it arrests their attention. And their inquiring eyes and earnest looks seem imploringly to ask the minister, the congregation, and most of all their parents, "What mean ye by this service?" What better opportunity can a parent have than after each Baptism to deliver God's message to his child, saying, "My dear child, the washing with water in Baptism is a sign by which God teaches thee, (1) that by birth thou wast unclean, (2) that God is able and willing to cleanse thee, and (3), that whenever you believe this and ask Him, He will do it for thee. When thou art older thou wilt find that God has said all this in the *words* of the Bible. But thou canst now more easily see that He says it to thee in the *signs* of Baptism. Think not that the water of thy Baptism took away thy sin, that it either pardoned or purified thee. No, it only told thee that thou needest these things, and that God is willing to give them to thee. Oh! then, my dear child, bring thy poor, perishing self, to Jesus Christ. He will not put thee off, for He has said that

He will receive thee. Thou mayest be as sure of this as that thou art baptised. For you know, my dear, that what an *honest man* says and signs—what he confirms by sealing it, he will stand by it. Now God has said all this in the *words* of the Bible, and He has sealed it by the *signs* of Baptism. Believe Him then, and come to Him to ask Him to do all this for thee, 'Ask and ye shall receive.'"

Thus far we have considered the uses which Baptism is fitted to serve to the visible Church, —calling her ministers, office-bearers, and all her members, to faithful prayer, and constant care, for the spiritual welfare of the baptised. But now,

III. *Finally*, We may not forget that this relation to the visible Church also *calls the baptised to corresponding duties.* Admission to the fellowship of the visible Church implies duty as well as privilege. He who is admitted to the fellowship of the Church pledges himself to maintain that fellowship. He who asks to be taught, and consents to receive the badge of discipleship, pledges himself diligently to use

those means of instruction which God has appointed in His Church—such as reading the Word of God, attendance on ordinances, &c. He who is admitted as a member of the Church is bound to "pray for Jerusalem, and to seek its good alway." He who receives spiritual things at the hands of the Church, is bound, as far as his ability allows, to communicate to her of his temporal things. In short, if it be the duty of the Church to teach, and pray for the baptised, it is the duty of the baptised diligently to avail themselves of every opportunity to learn the whole counsel of God, and to turn it into prayer for themselves, and for the Church.

Thus, then, we have endeavoured to describe the mutual relation that subsists between the visible Church and the persons she baptises, and to show the uses which that relation is fitted, in the hands of the Holy Ghost, to serve. That relation is far, very far, short of any inward or saving relation to God. It may—it often does—exist without any change in our relation to God. But, obviously and emphatically, it brings the baptised into close and

constant contact with the highest means of grace, and loudly calls upon the Church to use these means in their behalf.

True, it may be said that we thus represent Baptism as only calling the Church to duties that otherwise were incumbent on her, and which she is bound to discharge towards the unbaptised. Undoubtedly it is so. Baptism reveals no new precept or promise, speaks of no other doctrine nor duty than is found in the Scriptures. But, by the repetition of the same things in the form of significant signs, God more emphatically presents them to our view. And, by administering or receiving Baptism, we formally acknowledge and undertake these duties. That which has been so well said of the Lord's Supper is equally true of Baptism—is characteristic of A SACRAMENT : "Thou gettest no new thing in Baptism than what thou gettest in the Word. But thou gettest better hold of that same thing. And the better hold we have of Christ, the surer we are of His promise."

THE END.

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". . . We close the volume with a feeling of admiration mingled with melancholy, that a life so devoted and so permeated with trial should have come so soon to its close. It is a fascinating and instructive book, and gives an insight into missionary life which cannot fail to be productive of good."

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